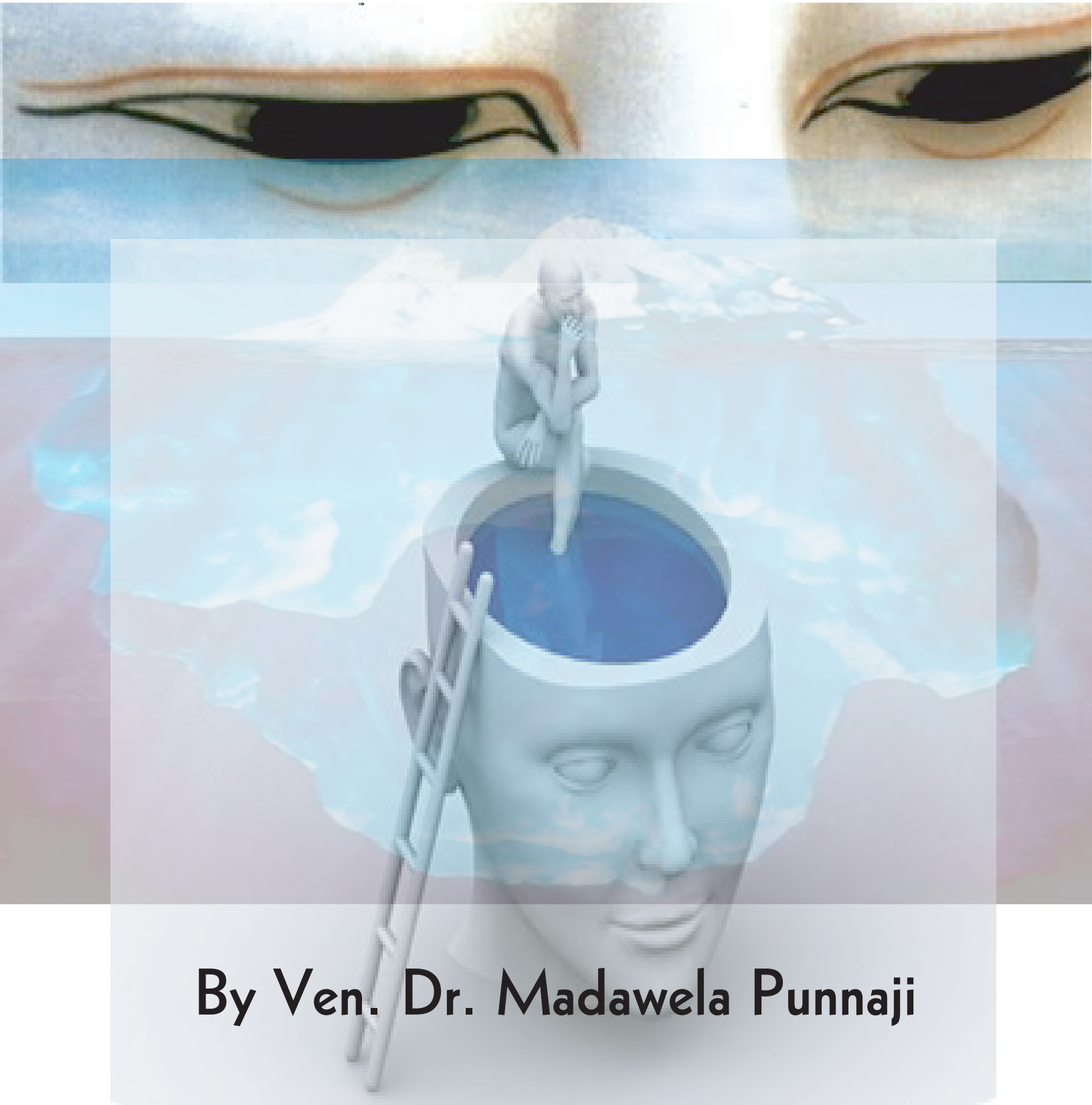


# **A Buddhist Perspective of Modern Psychotherapy & Evolution of Consciousness**



*By Ven. Dr. Madawela Punnaji*

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## Prologue

Western interest in Buddhism has a history of a little more than three centuries. It is only quite recently, however, that the Western intellect has begun to dig deep into the profound teachings of the Buddha. Modern psychologists who have experimented with Buddhist meditation have begun to notice a close parallelism as well as a few discrepancies between modern psychological thinking and the teachings of the Buddha. This paper is the result of a long research to discover the relation between early Buddhism and modern psychotherapeutic theory and practice, with the hope that it might open vistas of knowledge that lay hidden under the ashes of by gone centuries. This study has also thrown some valuable insights into the mysteries of the human mind that have puzzled many a great scientist of the modern age. An important consequence of this research was the discovery of the intrinsic psychotherapeutic value of early Buddhism, as distinct from the many varieties of Buddhism available in the spiritual supermarket today.

## Buddhism then and now

It is popularly thought today that Buddhism is a religion containing numerous myths, traditions and mystical practices. On a close examination of the original teachings of the Buddha, we begin to recognize the error in this popular view. It is therefore extremely necessary to avoid confusing modern Buddhism, as it is practiced in different cultures today, with what was taught and practiced by Gotama the Buddha and his disciples more than twenty-five centuries ago. What is practiced today in the three main forms of Buddhist culture, whether Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana, are mainly rituals and ceremonies with symbols of worship, accompanied by emotionally held traditional dogmas. This type of Buddhism is not different from any other religion with different dogmas, rituals and symbols of worship, which serve mankind only as a placebo, in temporarily reducing the anxieties and worries of life, regarding the here and hereafter.

*“An important consequence of this research was the discovery of the intrinsic psychotherapeutic value of early Buddhism, as distinct from the many varieties of Buddhism available in the spiritual supermarket”*

Buddhism originally was a practical solution to **the basic problem of human existence**, which is the insecurity of life and the resulting anxiety that underlies all our daily concerns, troubles and tribulations. It is only through a thorough examination of the early teachings of the Buddha in comparison with the beliefs and practices of modern day

Buddhists, that one may recognize the distinction between original Buddhism and the modern Buddhist traditions and practices. Without adequately understanding this important distinction between early Buddhism, and the culturally oriented modern Buddhism, it would not be possible to comprehend the important psychotherapeutic basis of the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize at this point that whenever the term "Buddhism" is used henceforth in this paper, it is the original teachings of the Buddha that is referred to, and not to any form of modern Buddhism that is prevalent among people of any Buddhist culture today.

## **How this paper is written**

The research findings presented in this paper are in response to the urgent need to come up with a successful psychotherapy, based on the original teachings of the Buddha. The original teachings of the Buddha are found in the earliest recordings, carried by rote in the form of the Pali *Suttapitaka*. Fortunately, the Theravada<sup>1</sup> school of Buddhism seems to have preserved at least some of the original teachings, even though this school may not have paid adequate attention to them. This school laid more emphasis on the texts called the Abhidhamma, which was only an interpretation of the teachings according to a particular school, rather than the original teachings of the Buddha.

In this paper,<sup>2</sup> we shall discuss at first **the basic psychological problem** experienced by all human beings, as seen by Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychotherapy. We shall then compare this with the description of the **fundamental problem of human existence** given by the Buddha. We shall also discuss the problem of existence as seen by Charles Darwin, when he formulated the theory of evolution. We shall see how these three descriptions wonderfully complement one another. Then we shall examine how Freud attempted to solve this problem, and how he lamented about the imperfections of his method. This will be followed by a description of the method used by the Buddha and the reason for its success in transforming individuals. We shall also dwell on the method adapted by the Buddha to go beyond the goal of Freud. Freud's main concern was to help his patients, suffering from abnormal conditions of health, to return to normal. The Buddha on the other hand, was interested in helping normal people to overcome their normal worries and anxieties, including the fear of death; and in doing so, he discovered a supernormal state of perfect mental health and happiness, through a process of evolution of the human consciousness. We shall also discuss this process of human evolution in relation to Darwin's biological theory of evolution, and refer the culmination of this evolutionary process in the evolution of the human consciousness to the point where the evolutionary process stops. This concern of the Buddha in transforming the normal to a "supernormal mental health" may be judged from modern

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<sup>1</sup> Theravada is the earliest school of Buddhism known to modern historians. It is the form of Buddhism found today in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia.

<sup>2</sup> This research paper was developed during a period of residency, from December 2000 to August 2001, at the Hsi Lai University in Los Angeles. The author was provided a secluded environment in which to organize and present the findings of his research that had lasted more than fifty years. The author had prepared for this task by studying modern science, Eastern and Western psychology and philosophy, before making a thorough theoretical study and a practical testing of the original teachings of the Buddha.

standards as too farfetched. Yet an examination of the Buddha's methods and his findings may open the eyes of those who are puzzled by the psychotherapeutic problems of the modern day.

## **The purpose of this paper**

Research and information presented in this study is an effort to meet the urgent need for an effective Buddhist psychotherapy. A review of historical and contemporary psychotherapies revealed the need for a thorough knowledge of modern psychology and modern psychotherapy, as well as an adequate knowledge of Buddhist psychology and philosophy, before one can arrive at an appropriate psychotherapeutic technique founded on the teachings of the Buddha. It is also essential, for psychotherapists who contemplate using Buddhist psychotherapy on their clients, to find out how this knowledge can be successfully utilised in every day psychotherapeutic practice. There appears to be a lack of such systematic Buddhist psychotherapy at the present time.

Buddhist principles relevant to psychotherapy can be mainly considered under the Fourfold Sublime Reality<sup>3</sup>, and specifically the Sublime Eightfold Way,<sup>4</sup> on which all Buddhist psychotherapeutic techniques have to be based. The Sublime Eightfold Way deals with the cognitive, affective and the motor phases of the reaction of an organism to sensory stimulation, and is therefore a broad based approach to psychotherapy. A unique contribution of the present research is the proposal that when the first step in the Sublime Eightfold Way, which is the Harmonious Perspective,<sup>5</sup> is well established in a client, then the other seven steps: Harmonious-orientation, speech, action, life-style, exercise, attention, and equilibrium will automatically follow, accompanied by a complete personal transformation to a healthy, mature, and happy personality. Conversely, according to the Buddha, all psychological disorders stem from the disharmonious perspective, which is the unhealthy way one sees himself/herself in relation to the world. The Harmonious Perspective is discussed in detail to provide potential therapists with the necessary knowledge to deal with the variety of psychological disorders that they will encounter in practice. The relationships between Freudian and other psychological concepts are also examined in relation to Buddhism, to show both similarities as well as variances.

***“The Sublime Eightfold Way deals with the cognitive, affective and the motor phases of the reaction of an organism to sensory stimulation and is therefore a broad based approach to psychotherapy.”***

Application of the above knowledge base with a view to transform the personality is the primary goal of Buddhist psychotherapy. This holistic approach contrasts with the common symptomatic treatment in conventional practice. However, Buddhist psychotherapy is similar to conventional psychotherapies in that the client is assigned the major role in the healing process, while the therapist plays a facilitative role. The

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<sup>3</sup> Commonly translated as, “The Four Noble Truths.”

<sup>4</sup> Commonly translated as, “The Noble Eightfold Path.”

<sup>5</sup> This uncommon translation of the eight steps in the eightfold way is an effort to facilitate comprehension.

methods proposed do not involve converting clients to Buddhism. Our sincere aim is only to help clients, who probably are mainly Buddhists or free thinkers, to view their problem from a healthy perspective. Specific case studies provide examples for practitioners who may wish to apply the knowledge base presented.

The first section of this paper presents detailed information on the theoretical background that would be useful to psychotherapists. In the second section application of this knowledge base in dealing with actual clients is presented.

## **Historical survey**

Psychotherapy, as it is practiced in the modern world, began with Sigmund Freud, the Viennese neurologist who turned introspective psychologist and psychoanalyst, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Later followers as well as dissenters began to modify or reformulate his theories. Today, there is only a jumble of theories, each in disagreement with the others. Students are confused and practitioners generally take an eclectic position because they are undecided as to which approach to take. There are a few practitioners, however, who choose just one position and adhere to it. Of late, many books have mushroomed, condemning psychotherapy. These writers argue that modern psychotherapy as well as psychoanalysis is a failure.

Although psychotherapy has gone into disrepute today, among several thinkers, people in Europe and even in North America, often go to the psychotherapist, hoping to find a solution to their diverse emotional problems. Going to the psychotherapist today is like going to the family doctor. It is not only the abnormal people who visit the therapist today; even normal people visit the therapist for counsel, when overcome by worries and anxieties. Even the law courts have started consulting therapists to decide upon the sanity of criminals. The therapists have a great influence on the thinking of people. Even politicians are concerned about this trend. People, who formerly visited the priest or minister for advice, when they were in trouble, today visit the therapist.

Probably due to this fact, Christian ministers and Catholic priests have started studying modern psychology, and they practice psychological counselling as a part of their ministerial work. Buddhist teachers, living in the West, are often called upon to help people with their emotional problems. They have also recognized the need for a form of Buddhist psychotherapy. Some modern psychologists who have studied and practiced Buddhist meditation find that some of the Buddhist concepts appear to come in conflict with modern psychological theory and practice. Therefore, the Buddhists who are interested in helping are faced with the task of coming up with a Buddhist theory and practice of psychotherapy.

No researcher seems to realize that Buddhism, in its original form, was already a form of psychotherapy. Unfortunately, today, the Buddhist practice has descended to the level of a religion of faith and worship. It has lost its psychotherapeutic significance. Therefore the task of the modern Buddhist is not so much to create a new form of therapy that is acceptable to a particular school of Buddhism or way of thinking, but to rediscover

the original psychotherapy that is already in existence, though hidden, in the original teachings of the Buddha.

## **Buddhism as psychotherapy**

In speaking of the psychotherapeutic aspect of Buddhism, it must be said that psychotherapy is not merely one aspect of original Buddhism. It would be more accurate to say that it was entirely a form of psychotherapy. The Buddha emphatically states in the Buddhist scripture, (*Anguttara Nikaya*), that it may be possible for a person to claim to have been free from physical disease even for a hundred years, but it is not possible for a person to claim to have been free from mental disease even for one day, except a perfected disciple (*Arahat*), or the Buddha himself. A critic may have doubts about this apparently ostentatious claim. Yet it is recognized by all Buddhist scholars that the ultimate aim of the Buddha, according to the early Buddhist scriptures, was to produce *Arahats* who were perfect in mental health. *Arahatship* was the culmination of the Original Buddhist Practice. If the *Arahat* is the only person with perfect mental health, the Buddha's ultimate aim or target was nothing below "perfect mental health" for all human beings who are ready for it. This means that Buddhism is not merely another form of psychotherapy, but rather the "ultimate psychotherapy," that brings about perfection in mental health. In fact, it has been said that while modern psychotherapy attempts to turn abnormal "suffering" to normal "unhappiness," the Buddha has been turning normal "unhappiness" into supernormal "happiness," by bringing people to "perfection in mental health," where even temporary mental disturbances, like common worries and anxieties, come to an end. According to the *Pali Nikaya* teachings, which are considered to be the earliest sources of the teachings of the Buddha, the Buddha has been described as the "Unsurpassable-physician-and-surgeon" (*amuttaro bhisakko sallakatto*), and even as the "Unsurpassable-trainer-of-personality" (*anuttaro purisa damma sarati*). Expressed in modern terminology, these terms may be rendered as "the super psychiatrist" and "the super personality trainer."

## **The human predicament**

With due respect for the above assertions, let us now enter into a more thorough and systematic examination of Buddhist concepts in relation to modern psychotherapeutic theory and practice, which would indeed help us verify the validity of these claims. Before we come to a systematic examination of Buddhist concepts, however, it is necessary to explain the human predicament in modern perspective.

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Modern biology tells us that we are but organisms by birth. We are born with five main sense organs: the eye, the ear, the nose, tongue, and the body. We are living in an environment, which constantly stimulates our senses. There are several varieties of disturbances in the environment that stimulate the senses, and each sense organ is sensitive only to one kind of stimulus. One sense organ reacts to stimulation only in one specific way. For example, light affects only the eye, not the ear or the nose. Sound affects only the ear. Similarly, the other senses are specialized to be receptive only to one kind of stimulus. Light stimulating the eye results in seeing, and in the same manner, sounds stimulating the ear results in hearing; so does the nose smell, the tongue taste, and the body feel the touch. All the different sensory data received through the different senses, such as, light, sound, smells, tastes, and touch, are combined or synthesized in the brain, to construct a mental image with a meaning concerning what we perceive. This means, the world that we are aware of is a product of the reaction of the senses to stimulation, accompanied by the activity of the brain, which forms a mental image and gives meaning to it. In other words, the world that we are aware of is a creation of our own minds, and it is going on unconsciously all the time.

Our comprehension of the world is limited by our senses and our brain's ability to reason out. The world that appears to be out there is not really what is found out there. It is only a picture produced in the brain, just as a camera does. The brain in addition gives a meaning to it. Modern psychologists as well as modern philosophers are aware of this fact. This means, the Creator of the world is our own mind, and each individual is living in his/her own "made up world." Yet we communicate with one another through the medium of language, and compare our views with others and so build up a cultural world. Through exchange of ideas, we build up a view of the world common to our culture. This is why each culture has a different view of life, and a different way of doing things. When we meet a person from another culture we begin to see that person as somewhat strange, weird, or offbeat not only in appearance but also in thought, feelings, and behaviour.

It is very important to recognize this fact in the modern world, where there is so much international and intercultural communication. This is not merely a Buddhist dogma, but a fact recognized in modern anthropology, sociology, biology, psychology, and philosophy. Because it is an observable fact, it was also recognized by the Buddha. This realization does away with the common reference to solipsism. Buddhism is not based on dogmas or beliefs but on the observation of experience (*sanditthiko*) here and now (*akaliko*), which any one can verify for oneself (*ehipassiko*), in the crucible of one's own experience (*paccattaṃ veditabbo viññuhi*). Modern scientists and psychologists seem to be only rediscovering what the Buddha discovered centuries ago. This is why Buddhism was a science rather than a religion at the beginning. It was not a physical science but a mental science or psychology. It was the **science of happiness**. Buddhism, however, is an introspective (*openaiko*) science, unlike the modern physical sciences that focus attention only on the external world that is visible and tangible. This is why it has similarities to Freudian introspective psychology.

It is interesting to note at this point that the modern school of psychology known as Behaviourism holds that, to be scientific, one has to imitate the physical sciences.



Behavioural psychologists have focused only on the external objective experience, and rejected introspection as unscientific. They define psychology as “the study of human behaviour,” and avoid the study of mental processes, which are subjective and therefore regarded as unverifiable. The behaviourists recognize the transformation of behaviour that results when the thoughts are changed. It is true that one cannot observe another person’s inner experience. Yet, one can observe another person’s change of behaviour and make an inference by comparison with one’s own experience. For example, if a person A is pinched by a person B, B cannot feel the pain, but B can know whether it hurts A, by observing A's behaviour. This is how we read another’s thoughts. This is also how a mother reads a baby’s thoughts.

The difficulty about introspection was that subjective mental processes could not be observed objectively, and are therefore they were not supposed to be verifiable. This is not a problem to the Buddhist because the Buddhist is not concerned with observing other peoples minds but observing one’s own. Buddhism is not a search for knowledge for the sake of knowledge. It is an effort to solve a problem in one’s own mind. As the structure and function of the body is the same in every human being, the structure and function of the mind is similar. If one understands one’s own mind, one understands other’s minds also. This fact makes it possible for a doctor to help a patient, whether the ailment is physical or mental.

According to the Buddha, it is possible to observe the subjective mental process objectively, by first removing the emotional obstacles to observation. It can also be verified by another by testing it in the crucible of one’s own experience. If you tell me that a fruit tastes good, I can verify it only by tasting the fruit myself. The fruit may be an objective experience but the taste is a subjective experience. I cannot observe another’s sight, sound, smell, taste, feel of touch, or thought, but I can observe mine. This is how a scientist verifies another’s experience. If I see bacteria under the microscope, you can verify it by looking at it yourself. If I here the tune of a song, you can verify it by listening to it yourself. If I smell a perfume, you can verify it by smelling it yourself. If I feel the warmth of a cup of tea, you can verify it by feeling it yourself. This is how the scientists perform experiments. If we cannot trust our subjective experience, we will not be able to perform any scientific experiment.

Some psychologists, however, have realized that psychology has to be the study of the mind or mental processes, and that we cannot know about the mind by looking only at the body and its behaviour. Thus the school of Cognitive Psychology has come into being. Modern scientists dealing with quantum physics have begun to realize that the physical world that they attempt to discover is actually a mental construct. There are many books written on this subject by scientists as well as philosophers. Since modern physicists began to realize that the external world is only a product of perception and conception, objectivity has become a misnomer and a myth. In fact, there is no “out” to look at, other than what “seems to be.” All that we experience is subjective.

This is why the Buddha called the objective experience, *nama-rupa*, which means, mental image and its identity, and the subjective experience was called, *viññana*, which means, the process of perception. The Buddha also saw that there is no “person”

who perceives, or a “thing” that is being perceived, but only the “process of perception” and the “product” of the process, which is also subjective. This means, the subjective experience, which is the “seer,” and the objective experience, which is what is “seen,” are both mental constructs and not real entities that “exist” in real time and real space. Even space and time are mental constructs. This is the meaning of *suññata* or the “emptiness” of experience, which Mahayana Buddhists commonly refer to. This subjectivity of all experience is neither idealism nor solipsism because the Buddha did not believe in “existence,” either subjective or objective. There are no existing “entities” but only activities that begin and end, with change in between. Without understanding this basic premise on which the teaching of the Buddha stands, we cannot understand the problem we are about to discuss.

The aim of the Buddha was not to formulate theories, but to solve the problem of human suffering, by each individual examining one’s own experience, rather than examining other’s experience. The result was the disappearance of unhappiness, which can be observed by oneself as well as by others. The systematic technique of the Buddha for the observation of one’s own experience was called *satipatthana* (systematic introspection). Sigmund Freud’s method of psychoanalysis through free association is also a method of introspection, where the patient is helped by the analyst, to observe one’s own mind. This explains why some of the findings of Freud are almost what the Buddha had pointed to many centuries earlier.

***“The systematic technique of the Buddha for the observation of one’s own experience was called satipatthana (systematic introspection). Sigmund Freud’s method of psychoanalysis through free association is also a method of introspection.”***

## **Modern Psychotherapy**

On an examination of the history of the evolution of modern psychotherapy, it can be seen that all modern theories and practices are centred on one fundamental problem, which is understandable in terms of the “structural hypothesis,” presented by Sigmund Freud (in 1923).

The structural hypothesis is a provisional theory of Freud which divides the personality into three parts, which are oriented towards three goals. The three parts are: the *id* that seeks pleasure, the *ego* that seeks to be in tune with reality, and the *superego* which seeks to be moral. These three parts of the personality, being differently oriented, must necessarily come into conflict. Freud saw that it is the job of the *ego* to put this conflict-ridden personality in order. Failure of the *ego* to do so would result in neurosis. Mental health is the successful performance of the *ego* duty.

1. *id* – dominated by the **pleasure principle**
2. *ego* – dominated by the **reality principle**
3. *superego* – dominated by the **morality principle**

Almost all modern psychotherapeutic systems could be described in terms of this structural hypothesis. All the different psychotherapeutic systems of today could be broadly classified into two groups, based on this structural hypothesis. They are: (a) those

therapies that are mainly concerned with the *id* and its expressions, and (b) those that are mainly concerned with the *ego* and its functions. The *id* psychologies are also seen as affective therapies, while the *ego* psychologies are seen as cognitive therapies.

It would not be necessary to discuss, at this point, the details of these different therapies, but it would be extremely important to go into a discussion of the **fundamental psychological problem** revealed through the structural hypothesis of Freud as well as the teachings of the Buddha. I see no better way to introduce this fundamental problem of human existence than to discuss the contents of the introductory sermon of the Buddha called the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutra*, appearing in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, and translated by me as "**The Revolution of the Wheel of Experience.**"

## The Buddha

"Oh disciples, **two extremes** are to be avoided by those who progress beyond the secular life. They are: (1) **devotion to sensual pleasure**, which is inferior, secular, common, immature, and futile; and (2) **devotion to self-mortification**, which is painful, immature, and futile.

"Avoiding these two extremes, Oh disciples, **a medial way** is seen by the One-Awakened-to-Reality, which opens the eyes, brings about wisdom, inner peace, super knowledge, awakening, and the imperturbable serenity, Nirvana. And what is that medial way? It is **the Sublime Eightfold Way** that consists of: Harmonious Perspective, Harmonious Orientation, Harmonious Speech, Harmonious Action, Harmonious Lifestyle, Harmonious Exercise, Harmonious Attention, and Harmonious Equilibrium. This is the medial way seen by the One-Awakened-to-Reality, which opens the eyes, brings knowledge, inner peace, super knowledge, awakening, and the **imperturbable serenity, Nirvana.**

"This, Oh Mendicants, is the **Sublime Reality of Insecurity**: birth is painful, aging is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, meeting what is unpleasant is painful, parting from what is pleasant is painful, and the inability to obtain what one wants is painful. In short, the five personalized constituents of personality are painful.

"This, Oh Mendicants, is the **Sublime Reality of the Origin of Pain**: It is that emotional urge, which arises again and again, accompanied by delight and passion, and which takes delight now here now there. It is the urge for sensual pleasures, the urge for existence, and the urge for non-existence.

"This, Oh Mendicants, is the **Sublime Reality of the Cessation of Pain**: It is the dispassionate cessation of the emotional urge without remainder, free from slavery to it, never turning back to it.

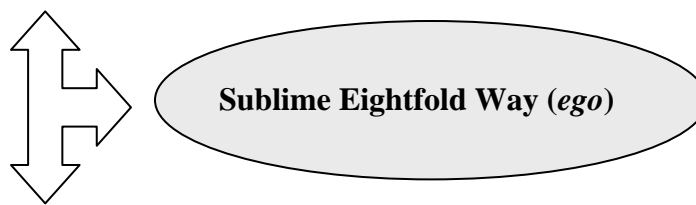
"This, Oh Mendicants, is the **Sublime Reality of the Way to the Cessation of Pain**: It is this Sublime Eightfold Way consisting of: Harmonious Perspective, Harmonious Orientation, Harmonious Speech, Harmonious Action, Harmonious Lifestyle, Harmonious Exercise, Harmonious Attention, and Harmonious Equilibrium."

This Sutra begins with the assertion that there are two extreme modes of living to be avoided. One is the pursuit of sensual pleasure, (*Kamasukhallikanuyoga*). The other extreme is self-denial and asceticism (*Attakilamatanuyoga*). Avoiding these two

extremes, the Buddha teaches a third medial mode of living (*Majjima Patipada*) called the Sublime Eight-fold Way (*Ariya Atthangika Magga*). This third medial way begins with an awareness of reality, which is followed by a harmonious goal orientation, resulting in a new way of thinking, speaking, acting and living, which is considered to be good, pleasant, and realistic, resulting in inner peace and happiness.

This teaching of the Buddha could easily be examined in relation to the structural hypothesis of Freud. Sigmund Freud pointed to a fundamental problem of human existence, which the Buddha seems to have been aware of more than twenty-five centuries earlier.

### **Devotion to sensual pleasure (*id*)**



### **Devotion to self mortification (*superego*)**

The two extremes of the Buddha, when seen from a Freudian stand point, would clearly be the work of the *id* and the *superego*; devotion to sensual pleasure is the work of the *id*, and self-mortification is the work of the *superego*. The medial way, which begins with the Harmonious Perspective, is clearly the work of the *ego*. One small difference, which will be discussed in detail later, is the middle path of Freud, which was the sublimation of energy; while the middle path of the Buddha was the pursuit of tranquility. The Buddha explains this further, in the sutra, in speaking of the Fourfold Sublime Reality.

Unfortunately, the sublimation of energy has left civilized man with discontent, according to Freud himself (*Civilization and its Discontent*, by Sigmund Freud). Modern concern about stress seems to be the obvious result. The Buddha seems to have come up with a solution, according to the above sutra, by proposing the goal of tranquility, which is confirmed by modern experts on stress management. It appears that if Freud saw that sublimation of energy had to be achieved through the pursuit of tranquility, civilized man would not be discontented. This point will be discussed in detail below.

### **Sigmund Freud**

In order to make this method of the Buddha intelligible to the modern Western mind, it is necessary to start by drawing attention to a few discoveries of Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychotherapy, and the originator of modern thought on this subject. Quite contrary to the common opinion that Sigmund Freud was against religion, it must be pointed out that he was only critical of the belief in a Creator God, as found in theistic

religion. He was not against the humanistic religions like Buddhism. In fact, he was reiterating some of the teachings of the Buddha. This has been clearly explained by Eric Fromm, the Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst, in his book, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*.

Freud discovered several important facts concerning the human experience, which the Buddha had pointed to, nearly twenty-five centuries before him. Freud also presented, in his own way, the basic problem of the human experience and suggested a solution. This solution, however, could only convert abnormal suffering into normal unhappiness. The Buddha spoke of almost this same problem in greater detail and offered a more proficient solution, through the conscious expansion of the human consciousness. It was more proficient because it was able to transform normal unhappiness into supernormal happiness.

This claim could be seen from modern standards as rather extravagant, but on a closer examination of the methods adopted by the Buddha, one finds that its probability is not easily challenged. The approach taken in this paper will be to present this problem and its solution, first as Freud saw it, and then as the Buddha saw it. The purpose of comparing Buddhist psychology with Freudian psychoanalytical thinking is not to support Freudian thinking or to show an agreement between the two ways of thought. It is only to facilitate the modern Western mind to comprehend the importance of the profound teachings of the Buddha, in relation to the practice of psychotherapy, using ideas already familiar to it. It is also to show that Buddhism is not a mere religion of faith and worship, but a psychotherapy that can make a profitable contribution to modern psychotherapeutic thought.

## **Psychic determinism**

There are three main types of hypothesis that Freud presented at three different periods in his life, which seem to have an important significance, seen from a Buddhist stand point. The first idea he presented was **psychic determinism**. What Freud meant by this term was that the subjective mental processes arise and continue, depending on the presence of necessary conditions, just as physical processes in the objective physical world do. It was after the 15<sup>th</sup> century, during the age of enlightenment, that the Western world came to recognize the law of determinism in nature.

In ancient times, primitive men thought that thunder, lightning and other natural phenomena were due to the activity of invisible spirits who controlled the external world. When modern scientists discovered how thunder, lightning, and other such phenomena occurred, the belief in spirits was discarded. What they discovered was the law of determinism, which means that every occurrence in the world was determined by the necessary conditions. This idea

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is generally accepted today even by school children. Yet unfortunately even in modern times almost everyone believes that the thinking, speaking, and physical behaviour of a person are activities done by a spirit living inside every human body, which is called the “self” or the “soul.”

It was Freud who pointed out, in the West, by using the term “psychic determinism,” that even mental processes follow the law of determinism. This means, there is no “person” or “self” thinking, speaking, or doing anything inside our body; it is only the workings of a mental process, similar to the workings of a mechanically worked engine, radio, or television set, whose workings are determined by the necessary conditions. The mind of the driver that drives a car at high speed is as mechanical as the engine that pulls the car, even though we like to think otherwise.

This fact was brought to the attention of the people of India by the Buddha twenty five centuries before Freud. The Buddha called this principle of psychic determinism “contingent concurrence” (*paticca samuppada*),<sup>6</sup> and presented an in-depth exposition of this fact. This fact is the basic principle underlying the philosophy of the Buddha. He even identified his entire teaching with the contingent concurrence: “He who sees the Dhamma sees the contingent concurrence; he who sees the contingent concurrence sees the Dhamma.”

Freud, being a neurologist, clearly saw that the mind was not an entity separate from the body but only an activity of the nervous system. He saw the mind as a process of activity that started with sensory stimulation and ended with motor activity. It was the reaction of the organism to environmental stimulation. He compared this process to the activity of a telescope. It was a chain reaction starting with perception, which was followed by an interpretation of what is perceived using memory. This then resulted in an emotional arousal, followed by the release of tension in action. The emotional arousal produced tension in the muscles of the body. This tension was uncomfortable, and therefore it was removed by the release of tension in action.

This release of tension in action, he called the secondary process. The emotional arousal always accompanies a mental image of what is desired, of what is hated, or of what is feared. That he called the memory image. The secondary process begins with this memory image, and it is followed by planning to get what is desired, to get rid of what is hated, or to run away from what is feared. The plan is made using a mental image of the future action, using the cognitive process, intelligence, and reason. This secondary process, however, can also be inhibited, by feelings of shame, and moral considerations, due to the activity of the conscience. Inhibition can also occur due to considerations of consequences and fear. This inhibition will be discussed in more detail later.

## **The unconscious**

The second important idea presented by Freud was the idea of the **unconscious**. He compared the mind to an ice burg, because a greater part of our mental activity occurs

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<sup>6</sup> This translation is a more accurate and more meaningful one than the common “dependent origination.”

without our knowledge. We are conscious of objects but we do not know how we become conscious of these objects. Just as we do not know how our body is made up and how it functions, we do not know how our mind is made up or how it works. This is why we go to a doctor when we are sick, or psychotherapist when we are mentally disturbed; the doctor and the therapist are supposed to know more than we do, about our own body and mind. This is why Freud compared the mind to an ice burg, where its greater part is submerged under the water, and only the small tip is visible above the water. Our consciousness is limited, specially the consciousness of our subjective mental processes and our memories. A greater part of our mind is beyond our awareness and therefore unconscious. The mind, however, is not a solid entity like the ice burg, but an activity like a flame. Its continuity depends on conditions. The activity is mainly the reaction of our body to environmental stimulation.



It is because a greater part of our mind is unconscious that it is so difficult to control the mind. Often our effort to control the mind is like trying to turn off an electric light by breaking the bulb, because we do not know where the switch lies. This unconsciousness or unawareness of our mental processes is because our attention is constantly focused on external circumstances and not on our mental processes. We often blame our circumstances, quite unaware that our worries are created within us, unconsciously. This is why it is important to be introspective. Introspection, however, is only “looking” within. It is only when introspection becomes “insight,” which is “seeing” within, that it is perfected. Our problem therefore is that we are not fully conscious of the mental processes that go on within us. It is only through introspection that we can become conscious of these unconscious processes. The ultimate aim of Freud was to “make the unconscious conscious,” as Eric Fromm constantly reminds us, and it must be done through introspection.

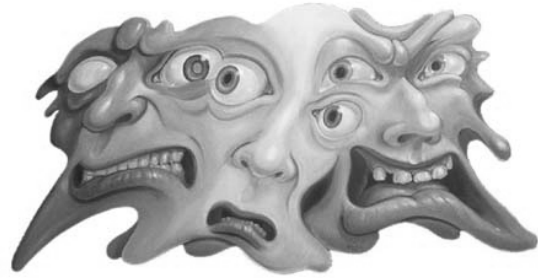
Freud also divided the consciousness into three parts, the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. The conscious part is like the tip of the ice burg. It is the mental activity that is going on in the present. The preconscious is that part of the memory that can easily be recalled. It is like that part of the ice burg which is just under the water and is visible. The unconscious is like the greater part of the ice burg that is submerged in the water and is invisible. What is in the unconscious cannot be recalled unless by a special technique. This analogy is only an aid to understanding the mental process. It is not to be taken literally. It is necessary to repeat that the mind should not be seen as a solid entity like the ice burg, but as a process of activity.

## **The structural hypothesis**

Having dealt with the basic principles of “psychic determinism,” and the “unconsciousness,” which Freud discovered, we shall go on to discuss the very

meaningful proposition of Freud, which is called the **structural hypothesis**. This hypothesis is presented not as a fact or truth, but as a provisional theory to explain the workings of the mind, in health and disease. It is the division of the personality into three parts:

- Id* - Pleasure principle
- Ego* - Reality principle
- Super ego* - Morality principle



We have already seen that we are biological organisms, unconsciously reacting to stimuli from the environment. This reaction is first cognitive, in that we perceive some object or occurrence in the environment, and then we interpret what we perceive as pleasant, unpleasant or dangerous. According to how we interpret what we perceive, an emotional arousal takes place, such as a desire for the pleasant object, a hatred of the unpleasant object or a fear of the dangerous object. This leads to tension which makes us uncomfortable. This discomfort forces us to release the tension in action, to obtain what is desired, to get rid of what is hated, to run away from what is feared. Once the tension is released, we feel comfortable again. This way we return to the original equilibrium. This tendency of the mind to release tension and come to a comfortable state of equilibrium, Freud called the pleasure principle. This was why Freud defined pleasure as the release of tension. Both the mind and the body tend to return to the original equilibrium, when disturbed. This tendency is also called **homeostasis**. The original state of equilibrium that one returns to is what is called mental health.

Just as the body fails to return to equilibrium when there is an obstacle to it such as a bacterial or virus infection, a congenital defect, or an accidental injury; similarly, our mental process fails to return to equilibrium if there are obstacles such as, not being able to obtain what is desired, not being able to get rid of what is hated, and not being able to run away from what is feared. This inability to release tension is what is generally called unhappiness, Freud called it “unpleasure,” and the release of tension is what is generally called happiness, Freud called it “pleasure.” Usually, we are not aware of this process in its entirety, we are aware only of our compulsive urge, the discomfort when it is not carried out, and the comfort when it is carried out. Freud pointed out that we also tend to defend these urges at all costs, if we feel guilty about them. We tend to hide them by means of various defensive mechanisms such as rationalization.

Here, the Buddha is in agreement with Freud. These defensive mechanisms are called *vancana dhamma* in Buddhism. The Buddha pointed out that we also tend to personalize this urge thinking: “this urge is mine,” “I desire,” “I hate,” or “I fear.” The emotional urge, with its tension, that compulsively seeks release in action is what the Buddha called *tanha* (usually translated as craving). He saw that this urge was compulsive (*nandi raga sahagata*), repetitive (*ponobhavika*), and variable in object choice and satisfaction (*tatra tatra abhinandani*).



Freud thought this urge was instinctual, which meant it was inborn and therefore unavoidable, but he described it in the same words: compulsive, repetitive and variable in object choice. Freud called the compulsive urge the *id*, which is the Latin for the word “it.” Freud placed the emotional urge in the neuter gender because it was a mechanical process. The infant’s personality is mainly the *id*; this is why the infant is referred to as “it.” The infant does not think rationally. It is unable to satisfy its desires without help from the mother or the baby sitter. Freud saw that the *id* was seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. He saw this tendency as the “pleasure principle.” In other words, the *id* was dominated by the pleasure principle.

As the child is brought up in society, and trained to behave, he is taught what is right and wrong, good and bad, and thus a conscience is built up, which makes him feel guilty when he makes a mistake in behaviour. This conscience will often prohibit him from getting what is wanted, getting rid of what is not wanted, and running away from what is feared. It is this conscience that Freud called the superego. Some Christians identify the conscience as the “promptings of God.” Freud rejected that concept, although he called it the “*super-ego*.” He saw it only as a carry-over from the culture in which the child is brought up. Therefore the *superego* was dominated by the “morality principle.”

As the child grows up, and develops the brain, the rational faculty develops, enabling him to find his way around, and even to get what is wanted, to get rid of what is not wanted, or to run away from what is feared. Freud called the rational faculty the *ego*, meaning “self.” By this word he did not mean a real entity such as a “soul.” For him the *ego* was only a faculty, which is the mental process of thinking or reasoning. It is probable that he used this word due to the influence of Descartes who said, “I think, therefore I am.” This *ego* that can think and reason out, and become aware of the world around, Freud thought, was dominated by the “reality principle.”

## **Instincts**

As mentioned earlier Freud saw the *id* as an “instinctual drive,” which came from within the organism, even though it was excited by external stimuli. Freud saw the mind as an energy system or machine, and he saw the machine needed energy to run. The energy, he saw, was in the *id*. That energy he called the *libido*. He saw the *id* as the source of energy (*libido*), which is used up by the *ego* as well as the *super ego*. Thus, ultimately, both the *ego* and the *super ego* work for the benefit of the *id*. It is the *id* that needs pleasure and comfort as well as the need to survive. Freud observed this in the neurotic personalities he was examining. The *id* though blind and unable to do any thing, was seen by Freud, as the main part of the personality, the *ego* and the *superego* are like employees working for the benefit of the *id*, to carryout orders and protect it. They also use the energy of the *id*, to do the work. Freud also saw, however, that even in the normal personality both the *ego* and the *super ego* work for the well-being and preservation of the organism. Freud saw the instinctual impulse of the *id* as the instinct of self-preservation called *eros*. Later he also spoke of the “death wish,” which he called *thanatos*.

As mentioned earlier, the Buddha referred to this same compulsive emotional urge as “thirst” (*tanha*), which Freud referred to as the *id*. Thirst is not something wilfully done by us, it is something that unconsciously occurs following the law of determinism. The reason why the Buddha used the term *tanha* to refer to this emotional urge seems to be the same as that of Freud, when he chose the term *id*. It was because emotion was almost a mechanical process. The Buddha saw that the “thirst” (*tanha*) is in three forms: *kama tanha* (the urge to enjoy pleasure), *bhava tanha* (the urge to continue being), and *vibhava tanha* (the urge to stop being). The first two comes under Freud’s *eros* and the third comes under *thanatos*. The Buddha also saw that normally people are carried away by emotional impulses. He did see that the emotions dominated the normal person: “By emotion the world is lead; by emotion is it dragged about; emotion is that single experience; which keeps the world enthralled.”<sup>7</sup> (Dhammapada).

***The Buddha referred to this same compulsive emotional urge as “thirst” (tanha), which Freud referred to as the id. Thirst is not something wilfully done by us, it is something that unconsciously occurs following the law of determinism.***

The Buddha saw that the emotional urge was strong and compulsive, even though it is “blind to reality” (*avijja*). He referred to the *id* and the *ego* of Freud as two parts of the mind: emotion (*citta*), and reason (*mano*). Yet he also saw that “Reason precedes all experience; reason dominates and creates everything.”<sup>8</sup> This is where the Buddha seems to differ from Freud. He does not see that the *ego* has to be the servant of the *id*, though most of the time it appears to be so. Freud too saw this when he said that the *ego* is in control even when it is weak. Yet he did not fully realize that because the *ego* activity precedes the *id* activity, and because the *ego* initiates the *id* activity, the *ego* could put an end to the *id* activity. This has been partly seen, however, by the modern cognitive psychologists. Yet the Buddha comprehended this fully and implemented it.

This miscalculation of Freud lies partly in the fact that Freud saw the mind as a machine that needed energy to work, and that he thought the energy came from the *id*. Therefore the *id* is dominant, like the weak millionaire who employs others to do his work. It is true that the *id* has all the energy, but it is the *ego* that is in control of that energy, just the driver and not the engine is in control of the energy in the car.

Freud also saw this *id* and its energy as an inborn instinct that has its origin within the organism, and therefore cannot be removed, but only expressed, suppressed, repressed, or sublimated. Repression is an unconscious process of forgetting the presence of the urge, out of fear or shame. Suppression is a conscious process of denial of gratification of the urge. Sublimation is to gratify the urge only within the bounds of social acceptability. The Buddha, on the other hand, saw the impulse as a process that has its origin outside, in the environment. It is the environmental stimulation that leads to the excitation of the impulse. Therefore, he called it an influx or “influence” (*asava*) that flows in from outside, rather than an instinct that flows out from within.

<sup>7</sup> *Cittena niyati loko, cittena parikassati; cittassa eka dhammassa sabbeva vasamanva gu* (dhammapada).

<sup>8</sup> *Mano pubbangama dhamma mano settha mano maya* (dhammapada).

The Buddha pointed out that the mood, temperament, or disposition of a person is essentially pure and calm in its normal state.<sup>9</sup> It is polluted or disturbed by adventitious pollutants; just as water is a pure substance, and it becomes impure only due to foreign matter falling into it. Therefore, just as water can be purified through filtration or distillation, the Buddha saw that the temperament can be purified and calmed through a systematic technique, because it is always trying to return to its original equilibrium.

## Buddha on the structural hypothesis

***The Buddha saw that the emotional urge was strong and compulsive, even though it is “blind to reality” (avijja). He referred to the id and the ego of Freud as two parts of the mind: emotion (citta), and reason (mano). Yet he also saw that “Reason precedes all experience; reason dominates and creates everything.” This is where the Buddha seems to differ from Freud. He does not see that the ego has to be the servant of the id, though most of the time it appears to be so.***

One might ask at this point whether the Buddha ever spoke about anything like the structural hypothesis of Freud. In fact he did in different words. He used an analogy saying that there are three kinds of people in the world.<sup>10</sup> One is blind in both eyes, the second is blind only in one eye, and the third has vision in both eyes. What are these eyes? The first eye is the eye that sees how to satisfy one’s desires. The second is the eye that sees what is good and bad. If we compare this statement with the structural hypothesis, it is clear that the person with both eyes blind is the *id*. And the person with the one eye open is the one whose *ego* has developed, because the first eye that sees how to satisfy desires is the *ego*. The second eye that sees what is good and bad is obviously the *super ego*. The second eye is also called by the Buddha *hiri-ottappa*, which means “abhorrence and

remorse” (sometimes translated as “shame and fear”), which is the “reluctance to do evil and repentance for having done evil.” The activity of the *super ego* censuring the ego is referred to as, “the self reproaching the self” (*attanam atta upavadati*).

What Freud saw, as the problem, was that the *id* comes in conflict with the *ego* and the *super ego*. The *id* is unaware of the external reality and it demands immediate satisfaction. The *id* is aware only of what it wants; it is not concerned about how it is obtained. The *ego* on the other hand is aware of the external reality, and only the *ego* knows how to gratify the *id*. The *ego* wants to gratify the *id*, but it can be gratified only within the confines of reality. Immediate gratification is not always possible. Therefore, the *ego* might have to postpone gratification. This, the *id* does not like. The *id* is uncomfortable till it is gratified.

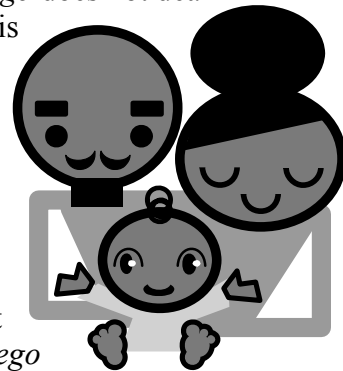
This conflict, between the *id* and the *ego*, sounds very much like the familiar conflict between the child and the mother. The child cries for food but only the mother

<sup>9</sup> Pabassaraṇ idañ bhikkhave cittaṇ agantuka upakkilesena upakkilittaṇ (Anguttara Nikaya I, VI, 1.)

<sup>10</sup> Monks, there are these three persons found existing in the world. (Gradual Sayings I, p111, 29.)

knows how to get it. But then, the mother has to prepare it before the child can have it. This takes time. Therefore, the satisfaction has to be postponed. But the child wants food immediately, and is unconcerned about how it can be got. The child remains hungry and cries till the food is given. The child, according to Freud, is mainly the *id*, and is dominated by the pleasure principle. The emotionally mature adult, on the other hand, whose *ego* is strong, is dominated by the reality principle. Even in the emotionally immature adult, the *ego* is in control, even though it is weak.

If the child makes demands that are detrimental to itself as well as to others, and the mother is undecided, in such a case the father may intervene and demand that the mother must not cater to the child's irresponsible demands. If the mother follows the father's advice, the child will not be satisfied at all, and it will continue to cry. So the mother has to find a way of satisfying the child while at the same time following the father's advice. This is an analogy where the father represents the *super ego*, the mother represents the *ego*, and the child represents the *id*. The *super ego* does not deal with the *id* directly, but only through the *ego*. The *ego* is always in control even when it is weak. The *ego* has to find ways of satisfying the *id* as well as the *super ego*. The *ego* becomes the mediator between the *id*, the *ego*, and also the external reality.



## **Mental sickness**

It is when the *ego* is weak that the conflict is not resolved, and the personality becomes sick. This means, the *ego* tries to push away the conflict and forgets about it. When this happens the *ego* is unable to pay full attention to the external reality and deal with it, because the unresolved internal conflict starts pestering the *ego* for attention. When this happens, the society in which the individual lives becomes intolerant and begins to condemn the individual for the negligence of responsibilities. This makes the individual become withdrawn from society and feel and behave as an invalid. The individual regresses into a childhood mode of behaviour. This is a description of the neurotic personality. The neurotic, though withdrawn from the external social reality, is fully aware of it.

The psychotic, on the other hand, withdraws from the social reality totally. He does not pay attention to it. He lives in a world of his own making, though he is aware of the physical reality around. In doing so, he loses his social identity, and acquires a physical identity. If he identifies with the physical body, he may experience himself as a robot, or if he identifies himself with the totality of the physical reality, he may experience himself even as God. He experiences as himself what ever he identifies with.

## **Ego psychology**

Freud spoke about mental and physical processes, not about persons. What is called his "personality theory" is only a mechanical theory of personality. He called it the "psychic apparatus." In other words, he saw the personality to be an impersonal process of psychophysical activity. Therefore, his theory is also called the psychodynamic theory.

Although Freud saw the personality as a mechanical process of activity comparable to a machine, or an energy system, some of his followers were dissatisfied with the depersonalization and reification of the personality. Some later psychologists and psychoanalysts who were existentialist thinkers, like R.D. Lang, criticized this way of thinking, considering it to be a dehumanizing of the human being, through “depersonalization” and “reification” of the human personality. (*The divided self*, by R.D. Lang). This latter way of thinking among psychoanalysts came to be called “Ego Psychology.”

Freud saw the *ego* only as an impersonal faculty of reasoning, the main concern of which was to manage the *id* impulses, and to resolve the conflict between the *id* and the *superego*, as well as to deal with the external reality. Later followers saw the *ego* as the “real self” whose main concern was to deal with the external reality. They were mainly concerned with the development of the “sense of self” and the strengthening of the “ego” to deal with the external world.

Freud pointed out that the “sense of self” is formed through the infant’s relationship with the mother. This relationship with the mother was seen as an “object relationship,” where the mother was the object. As Freud saw it, the infant does not see the mother as a separate entity from itself, at the beginning. It is later that the infant notices that the mother appears at times, and disappears at other times, and that the mother is not under its control, as its own legs or arms are. This makes it feel that the mother is a person separate from itself, and so a “sense of self” is formed. Then a relationship of dependence on the mother develops. In this relationship, frustrations and disappointments are experienced. These remain as memories, which affect relationships with other people in later life. These memories also affect the self-concept or self-image in later life, where the “self” can be felt to be weak or strong, resulting in feelings of inferiority or superiority, or what is today called lack of self-esteem.

Later followers of Freud became concerned with the development of the sense of self, which they identified as the *ego*. This psychology based on the concern with the *ego* and its relations with external reality was called “*ego* psychology,” or “object relations psychology.” The earlier concern with the *id*, and its conflict with the *ego* and *superego*, was called *id* psychology, which was rejected by the later followers of Freud who became interested in *ego* psychology. The new turn took place when the psychoanalysts became concerned with psychosis, which, they thought, was rooted in the *ego*’s relationship with external reality, and the change in the “sense of self”. Formerly, Freud’s main concern was neurosis, though his concern always extended to psychosis as well.

### **The Buddha’s approach**

Having discussed some of Freud’s discoveries and how he and some of his later followers tried to conceptualize the problems of human beings both normal and abnormal, let us

***“The Buddha too saw the individual human being as an organism with senses, a nervous system and motor activity. He too saw a psychophysical process starting from the senses and ending up in motor activity.”***

now examine some of the Buddha's teachings in relation to these findings of Freud and the Freudians. First of all, the Buddha too saw the individual human being as an organism with senses, a nervous system and motor activity. He too saw a psycho-physical process starting from the senses and ending up in motor activity. He saw it occurring in four main stages; perceptual activity (*viññana*), cognitive activity (*mano*), affective activity or emotion (*citta*) and the physical action which is the release of tension. This occurs, however, unconsciously. When we are conscious, on the other hand, and consciously interpret what is occurring, it is possible to act rationally.

Unconscious = stimulus → perception → cognition → emotion → action = **REACTION**

Conscious = stimulus → perception → cognition → rational action = **RESPONSE**

The presence of mind (*sati*) and the consideration of consequences, before the release of tension, can prevent the release of tension, if it is detrimental to oneself and others. Presence of mind during the action can stop the action. Reflection about an action already done can stop the action from being repeated in the future. Absent minded impulsive behaviour which is unconscious can be called a reaction, which the Buddha called an "unworthy action" (*akusala kamma*). A rational action done with presence of mind, which is consciously done, can be called a response, which the Buddha called a "worthy action" (*kusala kamma*).

## Personalization

The teaching of the Buddha about personalization (*upadana*) is very significant, in relation to Freud's structural hypothesis. He spoke of four kinds of personalization as follows:

### BUDDHA

1. Personalization of likes and dislikes for pleasure and pain (*kama upadana*) = (*id*)
2. Personalization of rational thoughts about reality (*ditthi upadana*) = (*ego*)
3. Personalization of moral principles (*silabbata upadana*) = (*superego*)
4. Personalization of the notion of self (*atta vada upadana*)

### FREUD

*id* – the emotional urge dominated by the pleasure principle

*ego* – the rational faculty dominated by the reality principle

*superego* – the conscience dominated by the morality principle

It is clear that there is a parallelism between Freud's structural hypothesis and the Buddha's account of personalization. Freud considered the *id*, the *ego*, and the *superego* as structural divisions of the personality. This assumption was based on the notion of "personality," which was a kind of "self." Even the use of the terms *ego* and *superego* implies that a concept of "self" underlies the hypothesis. The *id*, which is the Latin for "it," has been called as such because Freud saw the *id* as a mechanical process. It seems that Freud called the rational part the *ego* following Descartes' idea, "I think therefore I am." (*cogito ergo sum*). The *superego* was also seen as a part of the *ego*. This is why it was named as such. This means, the idea of "self" remains in hiding in the structural hypothesis, even though Freud considered the mind or personality to be an energy system or machine. This helped his followers to lay stress on the "*ego*," and want to make it more real.

The Buddha's fourfold personalization explains the problem contained in the structural hypothesis. Freud has personalized the *id*, *ego*, and the *superego*, in calling them parts of the personality. In addition, he has personalized the notion of "self" in using the term personality. According to the Buddha, the idea of personality is the result of personalization. This explains why the critics condemned Freud for depersonalizing the personality when Freud compared the personality to a machine. Although Freud compared the mind to a machine or energy system, even calling it the "psychic apparatus," and even speaking about psychic determinism, it appears that he could not get the idea of "self" as "personality" out of his mind. This is why this hypothesis is also called the personality theory of Freud. This means that Freud did not really make a full depersonalization of the personality.

The later followers of Freud carried the idea of personality even further. They criticized Freud for seeing the *ego* only as the rational faculty. They wanted the *ego* to represent a real person or "self." The *ego* psychology, or object relations psychology that resulted was interested in the relationship between the "self" and the external world.

In psychoanalytic therapy, the aim of Freud was to integrate these three parts of the personality. Neurosis and psychosis was seen as a disintegration of the personality. In explaining neurosis, Freud thought that the *id*, being a part of the personality, is denied expression, and is rejected by the *ego* through repression.

## **Buddha and the Freudians**

While the later Freudians complain that Freud did not emphasize the idea of "self" enough, or that Freud depersonalized the personality, Buddhist thinking seems to do the opposite, in complaining that Freud did not depersonalize the personality enough. Modern

psychologists who have become interested in Buddhism and Buddhist meditation find this to be problematic. Some try to bring about a compromise by saying that one has to

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build the self before it can be removed. Let us examine this problem to see if we can find a better solution.

The problem, according to Freud, is that the three parts of the personality are in conflict, because these three parts seek three different goals as follows:

- id* – seeks pleasure
- ego* – seeks to be realistic
- superego* – seeks to be moral or good

Freud sought a middle path to solve the problem. It was not the expression of the urge, to seek pleasure, as the *id* wanted, nor was it repression, or suppression as the *superego* wanted. Freud's middle path was sublimation. By the term sublimation Freud meant channelling the energy of the *id* along a socially acceptable path. If one is interested in sexual relations, instead indulging in rape or adultery, one can get married, or channel the energy through social or religious service. This solution seems to be very Buddhistic, in that it represents "good conduct" (*sila*), according to the five precepts, which is the common practice of the good Buddhist householder (*gihī*) or laymen. From the Freudian perspective, it is sublimation or the practice of the normal healthy personality. From the general, common perspective, it is the civilized way of living.

Freud, however, pointed out that the civilized way of living is living with discontent, (*Civilization And Its Discontent*, Sigmund Freud) because the satisfaction is limited by confining oneself to the socially acceptable way of living. The *id* is not fully satisfied. A man may not be interested in one wife, or woman may not be interested in one husband. This means discontentment. Therefore, the aim of psychoanalysis was only to change abnormal suffering into normal unhappiness.

### **Buddha's solution**

The Buddha went further than Freud. He also came up with a middle path, but this was different. He saw a way of integrating the personality by presenting a new goal to pursue. It was the goal of "tranquillity." Freud himself saw this possibility, when he said that the psychic apparatus was ultimately seeking a state of equilibrium through release of tension. But he did not see this as the solution to the conflict. The Buddha saw that what the emotional impulse wanted was the state of relaxation and mental calm, which is a state of happiness. When this goal of tranquillity is consciously pursued, not only is the *id* satisfied but also the *ego* as well as the *superego*. The *id* is satisfied because of the relaxation of tension. The *ego* is satisfied because relaxation does not come in

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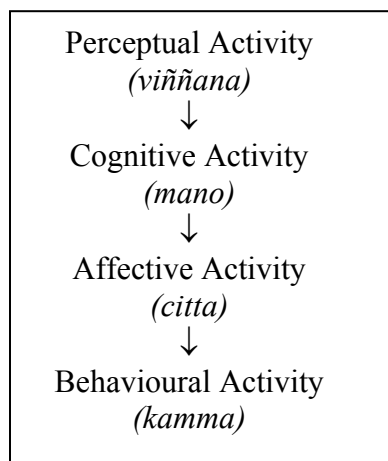


conflict with reality. The *superego* is satisfied because relaxation does not come in conflict with moral principles or social norms. This pursuit of tranquillity of mind is the pursuit of NIRVANA (*nir*, non + *vana*, movement). Nirvana is the **imperturbable serenity** of mind, which even the Stoics and the Epicureans spoke of in the West.

Another important insight of the Buddha becomes applicable here. When Freud thought of the structural hypothesis, this hypothesis became useful to understand the mechanics of the neurosis or even the psychosis. Yet it had a shortcoming, which was that by seeing the mind as a structure made up of three parts that come in conflict, one tends to think of the mind as an entity similar to a material entity that occupies space. Even if the mind is considered to be immaterial, it could still be conceived as a spiritual entity. To compare the mind to a machine, or see it as a psychic apparatus, or any structure, is to see it as an entity. This easily encourages the formation of the concept of “self” in relation to the mind. To personalize the emotions, or consider the emotions to be a part of oneself, is to lose control over emotions.

### **Buddha’s Functional Hypothesis**

In order to avoid this difficulty, the Buddha looked at the mind from a functional point of view, which falls in line with Freudian thinking as well as Buddhist thinking. For the Buddha, the mind is not an entity separate from the body. It is simply the subjective experience of the activity of the nervous system and the whole body. Put in modern terminology, mind is the reaction of an organism to environmental stimulation. The Buddha pointed out that there are three phases in this reaction that we refer to as the mind. They are the perceptual activity (*viññāna*), cognitive activity (*mano*) and the affective activity (*citta*), which ultimately ends up in the physical behavioural activity (*kamma*). The first three are observable as subjective mental experiences, and not as objective material entities. Even the fourth is a physical activity, rather than a material entity.



***“When this goal of tranquillity is consciously pursued, not only is the id satisfied but also the ego as well as the superego. The id is satisfied because of the relaxation of tension. The ego is satisfied because relaxation does not come in conflict with reality. The superego is satisfied because relaxation does not come in conflict with moral principles or social norms.”***

If we take as an example a young man meeting a girl: when light falling on the girl is reflected, and falls on the eye of the young man, he begins to see the girl. That is perception (*viññāna*). Having perceived, he begins to interpret what was seen using his

cognitive faculty (*mano*). Let us say, the interpretation was, “I see a sexy girl.” This results in an emotional arousal (*citta*). A message goes from the brain to the sexual gland, and a sexual hormone is secreted into the blood, and changes take place in the young man’s body. The body gets ready for action. Of course the young man being a civilized person does not decide to rape the girl. He has a conscience that prevents him from doing so. This example explains how the three stages of the reaction works.

The young man, however, has a problem at this point. There is a conflict in his mind, as Freud pointed out. The conscience or *superego* is in conflict with his *id*, and the *ego* has to bring about a settlement. The ego decides to go and speak to the girl in a courteous way and propose a date. This would be a Freudian solution. Yet the young man may be disappointed if the girl rejects him or if he sees her boy friend coming to take her away. This is civilization and its discontentment.

The Buddha goes further in suggesting a different solution. That is to understand that happiness comes from tranquillity of mind and not from gratification of sense desires. Therefore the young man should only take a deep breath and consciously relax the body, and calm the mind, and stop thinking about the girl. This is not easy because the emotional arousal is not a mere thought. The emotion is a change in the blood chemistry, and change in the function of various organs in the body. This means, the emotion is a physical change rather than a mere thought. Yet it is the thought that created the physical change. Just as the manipulation of a switch turned the light on, and no amount of blowing on the light can turn it off; in the same way, no amount of fighting with the emotion can turn the emotion off. The emotion is only a disturbance in the body, and it is created by a thought. It is only by changing the thought, which got the emotion started, that the emotional activity can be stopped. This is a fact recognized even by the cognitive psychologists today.

What this means, in Freudian terminology, is that the *id* is the result of the activity of the *ego*. Therefore the *ego* does not have to repress, suppress or sublimate the *id*; the *ego* has only to realize that the trigger that activates the *id* is in the hands of the *ego*, and by thinking in a different way, the *ego* can make the *id* to stop the annoying behaviour. It is true that the *id* contains energy, but this energy is aroused by the *ego*, because the trigger is in the hands of the *ego*. Just as the dog’s tail is not shaking by itself, it is the dog itself that is shaking it. The dog may be unconscious of it, but by becoming conscious it can be stopped. If the *ego* changes the interpretation, of the circumstance, the *id* will stop demanding. The cognitive psychologists have begun to realize this only recently.

***“The ego does not have to repress, suppress or sublimate the id; the ego has only to realize that the trigger that activates the id is in the hands of the ego, and by thinking in a different way, the ego can make the id to stop the annoying behaviour.”***

## Freud's Mistake

The mistake that Freud appears to have made is his emphasis on instinct. He thought the emotion is inborn, and therefore it starts within and seeks an outlet. Because the emotion is inborn, Freud thought, it cannot be eliminated; he thought it has to be gratified in some way or another. The Buddha did not see the emotion as instinctual. He saw it as something started by an external stimulus. He saw the emotion as a part of a chain reaction, where the intellectual activity of interpretation preceded the emotional activity. Stating the Buddha's position in Freudian terminology, the *ego* activity precedes the *id* activity. Freud, however, saw it the other way. He thought that the *id* activity preceded the *ego* activity, and that the purpose of the *ego* was mainly to cater to the *id*. This is a serious mistake that Freud made, from the Buddhist stand point.

The other mistake of Freud was his breaking up the mind into parts that come in conflict. The *ego* and the *id* should have been seen as parts of a continuous process of activity, one leading to the other, instead of being independent activities opposed to each other. He did attempt this at the beginning, when he took up the functional approach comparing the mind to a telescope. It was the structural hypothesis that created the confusion although it did help understand the conflict in the mind of the neurotic. The conflict displayed by the structural hypothesis comes about due to the ignorance of the neurotic patient about how the emotional arousal gets started. The problem created by the neurotic is like pressing the accelerator and the break at the same time, while driving a motor vehicle. It is the *ego* that arouses the emotion; for example the boy appreciating the beauty of the girl is the work of the *ego*. This arouses the passionate desire for the girl, which is the *id*. Now the conscience, which is the *superego*, comes to block this arousal and tells the *ego* to stop it, and the *ego* holds the break, while continuing to appreciate the girl. That is like holding the break and pressing the accelerator at the same time. This creates the conflict between the *id* and the *ego*.

The solution of the Buddha was to look at the mind from a functional stand point. That is, to see the mind as a reaction of an organism to sensory stimulation. The reaction being in four stages: perception (*viññana*), cognition (*mano*), emotion (*citta*), and action (*kamma*). This reaction is what creates all the trouble, as the sutra quoted above indicates. The Buddha called this reaction a compulsive thirst (*tanha*). A thirst is not something that we do. It is something that happens to us. It is almost a mechanical process. Freud recognized this when he called it the *id*, the Latin form of "it," the neuter gender. The trouble created by this thirst, the Buddha called pain (*dukkha*). The solution that the Buddha suggested was not sublimation but eradication, which was to take it off by the root. The way to uproot it is to stop the incorrect thinking, which arouses the emotion, and that in Freudian terms is to correct the *ego* activity. This is also the method of modern cognitive therapy.

***“The solution that the Buddha suggested was not sublimation but eradication, which was to take it off by the root. The way to uproot it is to stop the incorrect thinking, which arouses the emotion, and that in Freudian terms is to correct the ego activity.”***

## Buddha's Method

This means, in order to solve the problem created by the emotions, the underlying philosophy or the assumptions behind the thinking must change. That is, the problem and its solution must be understood. When the underlying philosophy is changed, a reorientation of the mind takes place, which is the pursuit of tranquillity. This reorientation results in a different way of seeing life and interpreting circumstances. For example, the young man who met the girl and appreciated her beauty will now think in a different way. Instead of looking at the surface of the body, he will begin to think of the inside of the body from an anatomical point of view. He begins to think of the skin, the flesh, the blood, the bones, the intestines, the faeces and all the repulsive elements contained in the body. He can also think of the mental condition of the girl, which could be very unpleasant, even though she may have good looks. This is a broader outlook than the narrow superficial perspective that leads to the emotional reaction. Often people begin to acquire the broader outlook only after marriage. This seems to be the reason for most divorces. This broader outlook is accompanied by the philosophy that true happiness comes through tranquillity of mind and not through the gratification of sense desires; and this means, changing the goal of life to calmness or tranquillity.

Here we may be reminded of Alfred Adler, who spoke about the importance of the philosophy of life and the goal orientation. Yet this fact was taught by the Buddha twenty five centuries before Adler. The Sublime Eightfold Way of the Buddha is based on this principle. It begins with the Harmonious Perspective and the Harmonious Goal-orientation. The extent to which Adler was influenced by the Buddha is a mystery, as it is in the case of Sigmund Freud. It appears that Freud was influenced by the first and second truths of the Buddha, while Adler was influenced by the fourth.

***“Learning to calm the mind is called tranquillity meditation (samatha bhavana). Learning to change our way of thinking is called insight meditation (vipassana bhavana).”***

This method of the Buddha for eradicating the emotional reaction needs to be fully understood by modern psychologists, and it can be of great help in their practice, as well as their research. The Sublime Eightfold Way, however, is a gradual progressive process of growth. It does not result in a sudden transformation. It should be carried out step by step. The first step is to understand the problem and its solution. The problem is the unconscious reaction of the organism to environmental stimulation. The solution is to stop this reaction by becoming conscious of it. At first we stop the active phase of the reaction. This is the stopping of emotional behaviour (*sila*). The second step is to stop the emotional arousal. This is to learn to relax the body and to calm the mind (*samadhi*). The third step is to learn to change one's way of interpreting circumstances. This is to cultivate a broad mind, as opposed to a narrow mind, and to consider the importance of others in our lives, and to practice patience, tolerance and the understanding of the other's point of view. Learning to calm the mind is called tranquillity meditation (*samatha bhavana*). Learning to change our way of thinking is called insight meditation (*vipassana bhavana*).

This practice of emotional control or purification of mind has four parts:

- (1) Preventing emotional arousal (*samvara*)
- (2) Eliminating emotions already aroused (*pahana*)
- (3) Cultivating calmness (*bhavana*)
- (4) Maintaining calmness (*anurakkhana*).

Let us compare the mind to a room. We want to clean the room. The first step is to shut the doors and windows through which the dirt enters the room. The second step is to take the dirt off from the room by sweeping or using a vacuum cleaner. The third step is to put clean furniture and decorate the room. The fourth step is to constantly keep watch and maintain the cleanliness.

Clearing the mind of emotional disturbances is also done in a similar way. First we prevent the arousal of emotions. This is done by guarding the senses, because the sensory stimulation is the starting point of the chain reaction that ends up in the emotional arousal. There are three conditions necessary for the arousal to take place: for example, the eye being open, an object being visible, admiring the object. It is not possible to keep our eyes closed all the time, or to avoid things coming into our field of vision. The third condition is under our control. That is the way we think about what we see. We can stop thinking about what we see, or we can think in a way that emotions do not arise. This is guarding the senses.

The second step is to get rid of emotions already aroused. It is important to understand that an emotion always carries a mental picture along with it. As long as this picture is in the mind, the emotion will remain. It is only by throwing the picture out of the mind that the emotion can be thrown out. The emotion as we understand it is physical and the picture is mental. The mental part is the cognitive part which is the Freudian *ego*. It is the *ego*, therefore, that is responsible for the continuity of the emotion. The mental image does not stand alone; it also comes with a verbal interpretation. Both the image and the verbal interpretation have to be thrown out. In other words, it is by changing the thinking of the *ego* that the emotion can be removed. This is a method used in cognitive psychotherapy today.

The third step is to cultivate calm. It is important to remember at this point that the emotional reaction occurs when we focus our attention on an external object, and then start thinking about it. Instead of doing that, if we can get into the habit of focusing attention on what is going on in the mind and body, which is the reaction, then the reaction automatically stops. This is like switching off the light. A switch is on when two wires are touching, so that the current begins to flow. The switch is off when the two wires are separated. In a similar way, when the attention is focussed on an external

object, the reaction occurs. When the attention is taken off the external object, and focused on the body and the mind, the switch is off, and the reaction stops. Of course, if the emotion is already excited, when we take the attention off the object, the emotion does not disappear suddenly like the light disappearing when the switch is turned off. The emotion is more like the hot plate than the light in this case. The emotion takes time to calm down, just as the hot plate takes time to cool down, even when the switch is turned off. This is the way the calmness of the mind is achieved and maintained. This method of introversion of attention is called “introspection” (*satipatthana*),<sup>11</sup> which is looking within, resulting in “in-sight” (*upekkha*),<sup>12</sup> which is “seeing within.”

The last or fourth step is to maintain the calm, so that the mind can never be disturbed again. This maintenance of absolute calm comes from “under-standing” (*pañña*),<sup>13</sup> which follows “in-sight” (*upekkha*), which is seeing within, or seeing what is inside. In other words, in-sight is becoming aware of the subjective mental process, which is the reaction of one’s body to environmental stimulation. By focusing the attention within, or introspection, carried out in a relatively calm state of mind, one becomes aware of one’s own reaction to stimulation. This happens progressively in degrees. First one becomes aware of the physical manifestations of the reaction (*kayanupassana*). Then one becomes aware of the reaction in terms of sensations in the body (*vedananupassana*). Then one becomes aware of subtle emotional arousals, which one is not aware of normally (*cittanupassana*). Next one becomes aware of the concepts that start the emotional reaction (*dhammanupassana*). When one has gained in-sight in degrees this way, one begins to become fully aware of the chain reaction that begins with sensation leading to perception, conception, emotion, and action. This makes one realize that what we call the mind is this impersonal, unconscious, chain reaction. There is no “self” involved with the thinking feeling or acting. Becoming conscious of this unconscious process, stops the emotional arousal. With the calmness of mind gained this way, one then begins to become fully aware of the cognitive process, beginning with sensation, leading to perception, and ending in conception. Then one begins to realize that the object to which we normally react as well as the subjective “self” are only mental constructs. The reality of the subject as well as the object is not real any more.

The mind then enters a state that can never be disturbed. One then becomes aware of the Sublime Reality of “impersonal experience” (*Dhamma*).<sup>14</sup>

Normally people stand on concepts taking them to be reality. People basically stand on the concept of existence, taking it to be real. When one has seen that the subject and object are only mental constructs the reality of existence ceases. The reality of both subject and object ceases when one gains this in-sight. Then one begins to see that existence is only a mental construct, created through the process of perception. In other words, existence is only a cognitive experience. Cognitive experience is the basis of existence. Cognitive experience precedes existence, and existence is a product of the cognitive experience. When one realizes this, one stops standing on existence, and begins

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<sup>11</sup> This is a more meaningful translation than the common translation, “mindfulness.”

<sup>12</sup> This translation is more accurate than, “equanimity.”

<sup>13</sup> This is a much more meaningful translation than the common, “insight.” This is explained further below.

<sup>14</sup> This is a special translation of the word Dhamma, which is extremely meaningful.

to stand on the cognitive experience, which is the basis of existence. This is “understanding” (pañña).

In other words, this is to Awaken from the “dream of existence” into the Sublime or Transcendent Reality – “Impersonal Experience” (Dhamma).

As one’s awareness of the reaction develops to a high level, and one begins to become aware of the perceptual process, when one begins to see that there is no real person thinking or doing anything here, when even the reality of the object perceived ceases to be real, then there is only a process of activity going on due to the presence of the necessary conditions. When the conditions cease, the activity ceases. With this realization, the “sense of self” disappears, and then the emotional reaction has no meaning. Therefore this realization stops all emotional reactions and maintains the calmness and imperturbability of the mind, which is called NIRVANA.

At this level a person has transcended the normal human level and has reached a supernormal level. This supernormal level of understanding is the “experiencing of experience.” It is also the “awakening from the dream of existence.” At this level, one does not personalize experience thinking, “this experience is mine,” nor does one identify oneself as, “this is my self.”

## **Transcendence through evolution**

This awakening from the dream of existence is a transcendence of the normal consciousness to a supernormal level, which is extremely rare in the world. It is seen as an evolutionary level of the human consciousness. The human consciousness, obviously, must evolve to a higher level some day. The normal human being is not at the highest evolutionary level. This is why there is so much crime, war and mental sickness prevalent in the world today. The Buddhists believe that, individuals do evolve beyond this level from time to time, and it has occurred in the past. Buddhists believe that the teaching of the Buddha is a description of the path of evolution of the human being. They also believe that the Buddha represents that fully evolved state, and his perfected disciples were also fully evolved individuals. They were those who had transcended the normal consciousness.

Buddhists also believe that it is this transcendence that all religions describe as union with God. Buddhists call it “awakening from the dream of existence.” The normal consciousness is aware of a “self existing in the world” while the supernormal consciousness is aware of the mental process that creates this “world” and the “self” in it, through the process of perception. By becoming aware of the process of perception, the reality of the “world” and the “self” is lost. This is the awakening from the dream of existence. Just as a magician looking at a magic show sees no magic in it, the one who has awakened from the dream of existence has seen how the process of perception creates the world and all the objects in it, including oneself, and therefore he sees nothing really existing, either subjective or objective. This is not a fact unknown to modern psychologists and philosophers, but they don’t normally take it seriously into their

everyday life, because the normal human being, although quite rational, is dominated by emotions which are blind.

This transcendence of the normal human consciousness can be viewed as the culmination of the evolutionary process, spoken of by Charles Darwin. He pointed out that evolution takes place because of a “struggle for existence.” He spoke of a “survival of the fittest,” but in reality, no individual survived, only the species continued. Every molecule that was formed had to break down, because it was dependent on the necessary conditions. It was the energy released by this breaking down that was used to build a new one. So the struggle continued but no individual survived. This means, only a struggle to exist continues, but no individual continues to exist. In other words this struggle is a failure. The continuity of this futile struggle is only a continuity of suffering? Every atom, every molecule, every thought and every emotion is in a continuous process of coming and going. Existence is a static concept, but life is a dynamic process of change, like the water in a river that is changing all the time. It is not the same river that one sees the next moment. This is why Heraclitus of Ephesus said, “one cannot enter the same river twice.” In a similar way, the baby that is born is not the girl or boy that gets married; similarly the old person that dies is not the girl or boy who got married. A person or individual is not a static entity, but a dynamic process of change like a wave in the ocean. Does a wave really exist? Does a changing process really exist? Is it only when the change is found to be slow that we tend to form the static concept – existence? If so, do we, you and I, really exist? “Existence is an illusion,” or more appropriately a “delusion.” If we can accept this, we will be immortal, because if we do not exist, how can we grow old or die? This immortality is not eternal life. It is freedom from the “delusion of existence.” This is the immortality shown by the Buddha, which can be gained through the evolution of consciousness. When the human consciousness has evolved, to the level where this truth has been fully comprehended, but in the absence of interfering blind emotions, the struggle for existence stops. This is why Buddhist meditation is of two types: first freeing the mind of emotions (*samatha*), and then only developing the thinking faculty (*vipassana*).

This process called life, which started as an unusual molecule that was able to absorb atoms from its surroundings and create molecules of its own kind, made a terrible mistake quite unconsciously. When, through the evolutionary process, the human animal became conscious, and able to think rationally, unhindered by emotions, he became aware of the mistake of struggling to exist. He realized that it was only a struggle to become permanent in an impermanent world. It was a futile struggle where only disappointment and frustration persisted. Becoming aware of this fact, the wise human animal stopped the futile struggle, and thereby stopped not only the process of evolution itself, but also all sufferings connected with illusory existence.

***Existence is an “illusion,”  
or more appropriately a  
“delusion.” ...When the  
human consciousness has  
evolved, to the level where  
this truth has been fully  
comprehended, but in the  
absence of interfering blind  
emotions, the struggle for  
existence stops.***



## **The Humanistic Saviour**

This is why the Buddhist does not think, “the saviour of the world is the Creator of the world.” The Creator cannot be a saviour because he is the Creator of suffering. The true saviour can only be a human being who can free himself from this suffering by transcending the normal human consciousness, which is dreaming that a “self” exists in a world that exists.” This saviour awakens from this “dream of existence,” and then teaches others to awaken from this terrible nightmare, “the dream of life and death.” The all knowing, all powerful, all good “God” is not an unknown Creator, but a known human being who has transcended all human weaknesses. Such an individual is the Buddha, and He is therefore the true God of the Buddhists. He is called “God-become” (*brahma bhuto*).

This description of the Buddha helps one understand that Buddhism is neither theistic nor atheistic. It is humanistic because this concept of God is a humanistic concept of God. It recognises the potential divinity of the human being. It is through the process of evolution that the human being evolves to the level of God. This is the humanistic way of union with God, which all religions speak of in their own way. God is understood in Buddhist thinking to be only the human concept of perfection. God is the ideal of perfection that human beings conceive, and struggle to realize through the practice of religion. When a human being does realize this ideal, he is called an Awake One, a Buddha. When this occurs, the process of evolution stops, because the futile struggle to exist stops and one has “Awakened” from the “dream of existence.” The essence of this “God” is not “existence,” as in the case of the theistic God; the essence of this God is “non-existence.” This God does not exist, even when others see Him as an existing person. This is the anthropomorphic God of the Buddhist.

## **Tranquillity**

The method of entering a state of tranquillity of the mind through meditation was known to the Indian yogis even before the Buddha. There were eight deep levels of tranquillity that the yogis had reached during the time of the Buddha. The Buddha went only one step further and temporarily stopped all activities of the mind by entering a state of quiescence which was similar to hibernation. This state was called *sañña vedayita nirodha*, which means, “cessation of sensation and feeling.” It was when rising from this state that the Buddha “awakened from the dream of existence.”

These levels of deep tranquillity were practiced, in order to rest the mind temporarily, not to remain in them permanently. This temporary tranquillity was not Nirvana. It was only a means to Nirvana. Nirvana is a state of inner tranquillity that could never be disturbed under any circumstance, even in the face of death. It is a state of tranquillity that lasts throughout the normal life. This imperturbable serenity of mind is gained by awakening from the dream of existence and death. It is immortality through freedom from the “delusion of existence.”

In order to achieve this, supernormal and extremely high level of development, called Nirvana, which is extremely rare in the world, both ancient and modern, one has to

give up the experience of existence of a “self” in the world. It is the “self-consciousness” that stood as an obstacle to imperturbability. This “self-consciousness” becomes a problem even when we try to control our impulses, because we tend to identify with our emotions and personalize them, and thereby become unable to let-go of what is a part of oneself. It is only when one is able to “awaken from the dream of existence” that the self-consciousness disappears. This was the special attainment of the Buddha, by which he went beyond the other yogis. He did this by attaining to the ending of all mental activity and returning again to the normal state. In doing so, he saw how the mind created the “world” and the “self” in it. He also saw how the “self” gets involved with the “world” in emotional relationships, and how all the painful experiences result, including meeting the unpleasant, parting from the pleasant, frustration, aging, disease, death, and the grief, lamentation, pain, depression, and exhaustion that follows. This attainment is rising above the normal to the supernormal state, which is freedom from all suffering.

This supernormal state, however, is not what we are aiming at in this paper; it was mentioned only to indicate what the teaching of the Buddha aims at, ultimately.

## SECTION TWO – THE SELF

Western philosophers, through out the history of Western philosophy, have been “self” oriented in their thinking. It was Descartes who made the categorical statement “I think, therefore I am” (*cogito ergo sum*). The existentialist philosophers assumed the “existence” of the “self,” even when they seemed to deny it. Even Sigmund Freud, who saw the personality as an energy system, used the term *ego* to refer to the rational part of the mind. His later followers became more interested in the *ego* as a reality, and changed their focus from a concern with the conflict between the *id* and the *ego*, and began to focus on what they saw as the more realistic relation between the *ego* and its object. Therefore, Modern Western psychotherapy is often seen as a way of strengthening the “ego.” It was Alfred Adler, who was an early associate of Freud, who first pointed in that direction.

### **The problem of self-esteem**

Mathew McKay and Patrick Fanning, in their book *Self Esteem*, write: “One of the main factors differentiating humans from other animals is the awareness of self: the ability to form an identity and then attach a value to it.” “In other words,” they continue, “you have the capacity to define who you are and then decide if you like that identity or not. The problem of self-esteem is this human capacity for judgement. It's one thing to dislike certain colours, noises, shapes, or sensations. But when you reject parts of yourself, you greatly damage the psychological structures that literally keep you alive.

“Judging and rejecting yourself causes enormous pain. And in the same way that you would favour and protect a physical wound, you find yourself avoiding anything that

might aggravate the pain of self-rejection in any way. You take fewer social, academic, or career risks. You make it more difficult for yourself to meet people, interview for a job, or push hard for something where you might not succeed. You limit your ability to open yourself with others, express your sexuality, be the centre of attention, hear criticism, ask for help, or solve problems. "To avoid more judgements and self-rejection, you erect barriers of defence. Perhaps you blame and get angry, or bury yourself in perfectionist work. Or you brag. Or you make excuses. Sometimes you turn to alcohol or drugs."

McKay and Fanning also point out that hundreds of researchers have been working on this problem, trying to discover the causes of self-esteem and ways of developing it. From what these two authors say, it is quite clear that modern psychologists have begun to see that the psychological problem is the lack of "self esteem," and therefore they have made "self esteem" their main focus of attention. They have begun to think that the solution to the problem is to find ways of developing self-esteem.

Bernie Zilbergeld, in his book, *The Shrinking of America*, points out that although psychotherapy in general has only limited effectiveness, his studies led him to believe that psychotherapy does positively affect self-esteem. Improved self-esteem "may be counselling's most important outcome." In other words, what modern psychotherapy has been able to positively achieve so far is only the improvement of self-esteem. This might, in the future too, become the main goal of psychotherapy.

## **Inferiority complex**

Alfred Adler, one of the pioneers of modern psychotherapy, pointed out that the inferiority feeling is at the root of all psychological problems. This inferiority feeling develops in early childhood because children are naturally weaker than adults. In addition, the growing child is bound to meet children who are better than him in certain ways. Therefore, no one escapes feelings of inferiority and envy. All children want to be in the limelight, be the centre of attention, and be accepted. Inferiority means that one is not accepted, one is not in the limelight. Inferiority feelings cause children to feel that they are not fit to be in the limelight, and that, if they were thrown into the limelight, people would discover their inferiority or unfitness and reject them. Of course, they are only rejecting themselves by judging themselves in this way. Yet, not realising this, they shy away from public attention. They begin to shiver when attention is focused on them. This inferiority feeling, when carried into adult life, prevents people from getting ahead in life. This could also lead to any or all of the many varieties of psychological problems mentioned above. Thus no one escapes from psychological problems, it is normal to have them - it is supernormal to be free of them.

People compensate for these inferiority feelings in various ways. One might compensate by trying to achieve greatness in some way or other, good or bad, social or antisocial. One might become a philanthropist, a criminal or a neurotic according to how one compensates. This is also how character is developed, whether good or bad.

Withdrawal into neurosis or functional psychosis is an attempt to compensate in an unrealistic way. This unrealistic compensation can also lead to perversions, alcoholism, drug addiction, and even suicide. This is also what makes people turn to crime and war. Good as well as bad can come out of inferiority feelings, depending on how one chooses to deal with them. And no one can escape inferiority feelings.

## **Buddha's idea of personalization**

More than twenty-five centuries ago it was Siddhatta Gotama, the Buddha (the Awakened One), who discovered a different way of understanding and solving this same problem of low self-esteem or inferiority complex. He called this problem "*dukkha*," which means, "pain," or discomfort both physical and mental. He saw this as the "discomfort of being," (*bhava dukkha*). The word "being" here refers to "being a self." In other words, this "self-consciousness" or consciousness of being a "self" or having a "personality," is the problem. We tend to personalize and identify ourselves not only with our body and mind, but also with things outside the body, such as our family, our culture, our nation, our job, our financial and social status, our educational qualifications, our achievements, and all such internal and external material and spiritual things that people normally identify with.

This identification is also called "personalization" (*upadana*) in Buddhism. It is through personalization that we acquire a "personal identity," or "personality." To "personalize" is to think and feel, "this is mine." One tends to personalize the body by thinking, "this body is mine." The body becomes a personal property. In the same way one personalizes sensations that arise and pass away in the body. One similarly personalizes perceptions, conceptions, emotions, actions, and consciousness itself, as "mine." One personalizes, not only the body and the mental processes that continue inside the body; one even personalizes external objects, like one's family members, one's ancestry, one's social status, one's job, one's income, one's house, one's car, one's bank account, and many more such things. The sum total of all that has been personalized becomes one's "self." What has been personalized is what one identifies with, and calls "mine" or "myself." Then one's "identity" becomes what one identifies with or personalizes. In other words, the Buddha saw that personality is only a concept, a perspective, which results from personalization of perceived objects such as the body and the mind. It is accompanied by a mental image of how one sees oneself, and is therefore called the "self-image."

Having "personalized" things and having thus created a "self-image," or personality perspective (*sakkayaditthi*), one then begins to compare these "personalized objects" (*upadhi*) with those of others. In other words, having identified one's "self" this way, one begins to compare oneself with other selves (*mana*). Not only does one compare one's body or mind with that of another, one even compares one's social or economic status, one's house, one's car or any other personalized property. By comparing this way, one begins to feel inferior (*hina mana*), superior (*seyya mana*) or equal (*sadisi mana*). This is how the problem of self-esteem begins. Personalization results in a personality, which is seen as one's "self," and this self-consciousness leads to comparison with other

such selves, resulting in the low "self-esteem," "inferiority complex," and the whole host of psychological problems described above. They are all the consequence of personalization and the formation of the notion of "self." The painful experiences recounted above are all the result of this personalisation. It may be true that out of all the animals in the world, the human being is the only animal that is aware of a "self." This does not, however, mean that this "self-consciousness" has to be preserved despite its painful consequences.

## Personality perspective

As mentioned above, the Buddha saw this "personal identity" as a psychopathological burden that we carry throughout life. This "personality perspective" (*sakkaya ditthi*) was seen to be pathological and unhealthy because it is productive of pain and suffering to oneself as well as to others. It is this "personality perspective" that is responsible for the "identity crisis" described by Erik Erikson. This "identity crisis" is what the Buddha called "uncertainty" (*vicikiccha*), which is the inability to decide what one should identify with. "Uncertainties" like "Who am I now?" "Who was I in the past?" and "What will I be in the future" can arise only if one is conscious of a "self." This "uncertainty" is also the inability to decide whether to take sides with our personalised emotional impulses (*asava*) and become pleasure seekers (*kamasukhallikanuyoga*), or to take sides with our personalised conscience (*hiri ottappa*) and become ascetics (*attakilamanuyoga*). But asceticism is not better than pleasure seeking. The Buddha saw that asceticism is based on mere suppressive, self-denying vows (*silabbata*) that split the personality and create conflict within. The person who is free from the "personality perspective" is free from uncertainty and self-denying vows. Such individuals are able to successfully eliminate an emotional impulse, because they do not give it power by personalising it. They do not see the impulse as a part of themselves, and therefore can easily let it go.

***Personalization results in a personality, which is seen as one's "self," and this self-consciousness leads to comparison with other such selves, resulting in the low "self-esteem," "inferiority complex," and the whole host of psychological problems.***

The solution to the problem of self-esteem, which the Buddha offers, is simple. It is to attack the problem at its root. It is to give up personalising and the measuring. In other words, we have to depersonalise what has been personalised. This is something that people generally hesitate to do. They hate to lose their "self" however unpleasant it may be. To lose the "self," they feel, is to lose 'their very "being" or "existence." They do not realize that their notions of "self," "being," "existence," and "identity" are only pathological concepts, which they have acquired through the personalization of perceived objects. Because we do not generally meet people who have consciously rooted out their "self identity" we think it is abnormal to be without such a "self identity." The absence of a "self identity," does not reify a person or turn a person into a "thing," such as a robot. It only turns a selfish, frightened, defensive, and unhappy person into an unselfish, fearless, cooperative, kind, and happy one. It leads a self-centred person to become interested in the welfare of others, to see that another's pain is as important as one's own. Such a selfless individual does not make a distinction between one-self and others,

because to do so is not only to be egoistic and self-centred, but also to be egotistic and selfish.

In Buddhism this conscious removal of the “self identity” is regarded as a hallowed, extraordinary, “supernormal” (*ariya*) condition, which is a superior state of mental health. Because this is not the ordinary human state, it is also seen as a “superhuman” (*uttarimanussa*), transcendent (*lokuttara*), and divine (*brahma*) state. This absence of the notion of “self” is not merely a peculiar Buddhist concept, even Jesus seems to refer to it in the Christian Gospels: "He who loses his self for my sake shall find it" (Mat. 10:39). This concept is also found in Hinduism where enlightenment is seen as the loss of the "individual self" when it merges with the "Universal Self" of God (*Brahma*). This is also the common mystical experience of “at-one-ment” in all theistic religions, where the soul unites with God. If the individual soul unites with the universal soul of God, the individual soul cannot remain separate, just as when a river enters the ocean, it cannot remain as a separate entity.

### **Depersonalization disorder**

Although, according to ancient religious thinking, depersonalisation is seen as a healthy activity that transforms a person from a normal to a supernormal state, I am aware that this idea is seen in modern psychiatry as a pathological condition. According to the *Dictionary of Psychology* by Arthur S. Reber (Penguin Books), this term “depersonalisation” represents an emotional disorder in which there is loss of contact with one's personal reality, a *derealization* accompanied by feelings of strangeness and an unreality of experience. In severe cases, parts of one's body feel alien or altered in size and one may have the experience of perceiving oneself from a distance. This condition is called *depersonalization disorder* or *depersonalization neurosis*. The conscious depersonalisation of personality by the Buddhist can easily be confused with the pathological condition mentioned above, although it is quite distinct from the pathological condition in several ways.

***“The solution to the problem of self-esteem, which the Buddha offers, is simple. It is to attack the problem at its root. It is to give up personalising and the measuring. In other words, we have to depersonalise what has been personalised.”***

This confusion seems to arise due to a staunch belief of the neo-Freudians, in a personal ego. It was Paul Schilder (1886-1940) and Paul Federn (1872 - 1950), both Freudians who described the *ego* as the "omnipresent component of consciousness." Paul Schilder identified the *ego* not only as the "thinker" as Decarte did, but also as the feeler, perceiver and actor. "The *ego* thinks, feels, perceives, has a past and present... every experience presupposes an *ego*." (Schlder, P. *Medical Psychology*, pp 290-300, 1953). Paul Federn spoke of a "sense of *ego*" not as something that is perceived specifically but as something that one is generally aware of continuously. Edoardo Weis writing about Federn says, "The sense of *ego* which is omnipresent, is not ordinarily recognized. Yet, variations in intensity of *ego* feeling are a matter of common experience. When tired or

drowsy, we feel numb; upon waking from a refreshing sleep, or upon receiving exciting news, we feel an invigorated "sense of *ego*". Federn spoke of an "*ego* cathexis." This fluctuation of the "sense of *ego*" was explained by means of his theory of "libido cathexis," or emotional investment. What it means is that if the *ego* becomes emotionally interested in an object, there is the experience of the "sense of *ego*." When the *ego* withdraws its interest, the object appears strange. The feeling of depersonalisation, which is described as the "loss of the sense of reality of one's self," is understood to be a similar estrangement, similar to inadequate investment of libido either in the body or in the mind, and can be caused by different emotional reasons."

We do concede that there can be pathological cases of depersonalisation resulting from what the Buddha called "the urge to get rid of existence" (*vibhava tanha*), which is based on a dislike for what exists. These pathological cases of depersonalisation are in fact "unconscious" processes. What we are referring to here is a "conscious" process of depersonalisation based on a full awareness of reality. This conscious depersonalisation is something practiced not only in Buddhism, but also in other religions like Hinduism and

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even in Christianity as mentioned before. There is, however, a difference in the degree of depersonalisation in the different religions. In Hinduism and Christianity, there is always a subtle "self" that remains, which is called "soul" or "atman." But in Buddhism, there is a radical depersonalisation where nothing remains to identify as a "self."

It is interesting to notice, however, that the pathological case of depersonalising as described by Federn involves the withdrawal of libido cathexis from the object, though unconsciously done by the patient. The Buddhist practice of conscious depersonalisation is quite similar to the above in that it could be seen as a withdrawal of libido cathexis, but this is done consciously. Further, this pathological depersonalisation is not a complete depersonalisation. It is a partial depersonalisation where the *ego* remains as the subject while the

object alone is depersonalised. Edoardo Weiss says on this subject, "The *ego* may react to an external situation presenting a conflict, by withdrawing itself from the sense organs, thus causing the outer world to be unreal; it may withdraw itself similarly from a body organ, which has become the source of unpleasant sensations, or from some objectionable wish or affect. (Weir, E. *The Principles of Psychodynamics*. NY. Grune and Stratton, 1950).

## Complete depersonalization

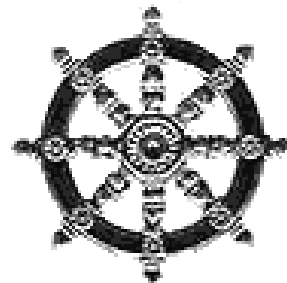
It is clear that this unconscious partial depersonalization is the reason for the complaint and the suffering in the pathological condition, as Reber described in his *Dictionary of Psychology*, “feelings of strangeness and unreality of experience. In severe cases, parts of **one’s body** feel alien or altered in size and **one** may have the experience of perceiving **oneself** from a distance.” (*The **Bolds** are mine, in order to draw attention to the **personalized** subject, and the **depersonalized** object*). Complete depersonalization consciously executed results in freedom from worry and fear because such depersonalization frees one from the “notion of self,” which is responsible for all worries and fears. The self-centered mind is always unhappy while the selfless mind is always happy. It is because people prefer to hold on to the "personality perspective" rather than let it go, that they continue to suffer from personality disorders. The few individuals who learn to consciously let go of the “self consciousness” gain freedom from mental sickness and suffering.

Although letting go of the “self identity” sounds like an impossible or at least a very difficult task, it can be achieved. The Buddha did it, and so did all his enlightened disciples. It is what all Buddhists attempt to do in their practice. It involves a sacrifice of what one cherishes most, the feeling of "being." The people who feel their "self" crushed or rejected are the people who hesitate most to let go, they hang on to their “self” and are very defensive. Yet their freedom lies only in letting go of this false "self." This “self” has to be seen as a burden that we are carrying all the time. Freedom is found by letting go of the burden. In Buddhism, this letting go of the "self" is called "laying down the burden." Probably this was what Jesus meant when he said, "Come unto me those who are heavy laden, and I shall give you rest."

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The Buddha not only saw that this “self identity” has to be eradicated from our thoughts, feelings and behaviour, but he also discovered the technique of doing so. This technique is what He taught as the Supernormal Eight-fold Way (*ariya atthangika magga*), the eight constituents of which are as follows:

- 1. Harmonious perspective**
- 2. Harmonious orientation**
- 3. Harmonious speech**
- 4. Harmonious action**
- 5. Harmonious life style**
- 6. Harmonious practice**
- 7. Harmonious attention**
- 8. Harmonious equilibrium**





This technique begins with the Harmonious Perspective, which is a perspective free of self-centred or selfish thinking, where self-consciousness disappears, because it is not supported by self-centred emotions. Such a mind is calm and tranquil, free of conflict both internal and external. It is also kind and compassionate, thinking of “all” instead of “I” and “you.” This is a paradigm shift within a person, which brings about peace and harmony within and without.

## **The Harmonious perspective**

This Harmonious Perspective results from an understanding of the fundamental problem of existence, and its solution. Before we can find a solution, the cause of the problem should be understood. The solution then is the removal of the cause, but a method has to be adopted to remove the cause. The Buddha, along with modern psychologists, especially the Freudians, was aware that the problem we are faced with is a **conflict between our self-centered blind emotions and reality**, which has two parts: the inner and the outer. The outer conflict is the familiar conflict between our emotions and the reality of impermanence around us; for example, the impermanence of life itself, ending in death, or the mere change in our pleasant relationships in parting from our loved ones, or meeting the unavoidable devastating effects of a tornado, an earthquake, or even of war. The inner conflict is the conflict between our blind emotions and our reason, which is aware of the impermanent reality around us. It is a conflict between two parts of our own mind, **emotion** and **reason**.

When emotion and reason are in conflict, emotion always tends to win. Emotion is powerful but blind. Reason is weak though intelligent. Yet intelligence can be more successful than brute power. It is true that emotions have helped the lower animals to some extent, in defending themselves from danger, and in the continuation of their species, although it is not the best defense, for we see its failure when we see a lion chasing the deer. The human beings, however, have a better tool for this purpose. This tool is what distinguishes the human being from all other animals. It is the human intelligence, which has helped humankind through out history to tide through the troubles and tribulations of life, despite its imperfections. The imperfection in the intelligence, when seriously considered, appears to be the result of blind emotions interfering with proper thinking.

Emotions have been to mankind a nagging vestige carried forward from an earlier evolutionary stage, like the appendix, which has to be removed or kept under the control of the later developed but more effective intelligence. It is when emotion plays a dominant role that all psychopathic problems arise.

In seeking the way to gain control over emotions, it is important to understand that the human mind is not an entity separate from the body. It is the subjective experience of the activity of the body itself. It is the result of the activity of the nervous system. What we commonly call the mind is mainly two parts of this activity: the cognitive and the affective, which is subjectively experienced as reason and emotion, which often come in conflict and create our problem.

The immature child or adult is dominated by emotion to a great extent, whereas the mature adult is mostly dominated by reason. Psychotherapy is an effort to make an

immature person become mature. The reality of the immature person, which is influenced by emotion, is quite different from that of the mature one. The mature mind can think more clearly, because it is less hindered by emotions. The harmonious perspective is therefore a mature perspective.

The modern cognitive psychologists are becoming aware of the importance of developing the cognitive process. They have understood that the cognitive process does not have to fight with the affective process because the cognitive process is already in control of the affective process. It is the cognitive process that is responsible for the bad behaviour of the affective process. This is why cognitive therapy deals with the cognitive process in order to correct the affective activity. In other words the emotions are corrected by correcting the rational faculty. This is why the Buddha started with the Harmonious Perspective. This was why even Sigmund Freud pointed out that “where the *id* is, there shall be the *ego*.”

Both the Buddha as well as Freud saw that emotions or the affective process comes in conflict with reason or the cognitive process. Freud spoke of it terms of the *id* coming in conflict with the *ego*. Reason is aware of the reality around, and therefore wants to be in tune with reality, while blind emotion is only interested in expressing itself in action, to obtain immediate gratification. This is why the child and the neurotic, who are dominated mainly by emotions, acts emotionally rather than rationally.

The Buddha saw a solution to this conflict not through suppression, repression, or sublimation. His method was to understand that emotion is a physical disturbance created by thinking. If we learn to correct our thinking, the mind becomes free from emotional disturbance. Such a mind is calm and tranquil. This tranquil mind is the healthy and happy mind. Such a mind is neither normal nor abnormal. It is **Supernormal** because perfect tranquillity is not a normal phenomenon. The aim of the Buddha was **Perfect Imperturbability Of Mind**, at all times. The tranquil mind is free of self-centred emotions. Therefore, it is not only dominated by reason, it is also free of the “sense of self.” Tranquillity depersonalizes the personality. It is only when this depersonalization has been perfected cognitively, that the tranquillity will remain. Otherwise, the mind can get disturbed again and the tranquillity is lost. Therefore, while in the tranquil state, the depersonalization must be consciously perfected. We may not be able to attain to that ideal state immediately, but every step taken in that direction brings one to a greater level of happiness, the problem being solved gradually to a greater and greater degree. In other words, the solution grows in degrees.

***“Tranquillity depersonalizes the personality. It is only when this depersonalization has been perfected cognitively, that the tranquillity will remain. Otherwise, the mind can get disturbed again and the tranquillity is lost. Therefore, while in the tranquil state, the depersonalization must be consciously perfected”***

## Levels of presentation

Harmonious perspective, in short, is becoming aware of the problem and its solution. It is in making this paradigm shift that the therapist can help. The rest is the work of the patient, which often automatically follows. The therapist acts as a teacher rather than a doctor, and the patient becomes a student. The Buddha presented the problem and its solution, in the form of the **Fourfold Sublime Reality**.

### *The Fourfold Sublime Reality*

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. <b>The problem</b>  | – Conflict between emotions and reality |
| 2. <b>The cause</b>    | – The blind emotions                    |
| 3. <b>The solution</b> | – Elimination of blind emotions         |
| 4. <b>The method</b>   | – The Sublime Eightfold Way             |

This reality is supernormal because it is not the reality of the normal or the abnormal person. It is a reality that rises above the normal to a supernormal level, though it is quite accessible. Yet one has to gain access to it in degrees. Therefore it has to be described in relation to four main levels of development as follows:

### *Levels of Development*

- |                                   |                                     |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Cognitive Reorientation</b> | – changing our sense of values      |
| 2. <b>Expansion of Heart</b>      | – sincerely helping others          |
| 3. <b>Tranquillity of mind</b>    | – learning how to relax and be calm |
| 4. <b>Paradigm Shift</b>          | – depersonalizing the self          |

Having understood the Harmonious Perspective, it is possible to see how a problem such as “low self esteem” can be solved through this technique.

#### ***1. The first level of development - Cognitive Reorientation***

At this level we consider the sense of values. Our judgement of superiority or inferiority depends on our sense of values. For example, if I think that financial prosperity is of great value, I will begin to feel inferior when I meet a person who is richer than me. If I do not think so, I will not feel inferior. If I think that having a university degree is of great value, I will feel inferior when I meet someone who has a degree higher than mine. If I think that physical height is of great value, I will feel inferior when I meet a person taller than me. Our feeling of inferiority or low self-esteem depends on our sense of values. Therefore the problem is solved at this level by changing our sense of values.

## ***2. The second level of development – Expansion of Heart***

At this level we consider the expansion of heart. When we become interested in others, we stop worrying about our superiority or inferiority. We realize that these feelings of inferiority are present in everyone, even great kings and emperors. What is important is to help the needy, and be concerned for the welfare of all humanity, and even animals and plants. Such thoughts dissolve the feelings of low self-esteem. Our hearts become broad. Only narrow minds feel inferior.

## ***3. The third level of development – Tranquillity of Mind***

At this level we consider the importance of calmness. We learn to relax the body and calm the mind. We learn to calm the emotions instead of fighting, suppressing or repressing them. We learn that emotions are controlled by mental images. We can learn to change our mental images and maintain calming images in the mind. We walk calmly, work calmly, talk calmly, and think calming thoughts. We avoid emotional thoughts as far as we can. Even if we become emotional by accident, we know how to regain our composure and return to calmness quickly. This way, thoughts of inferiority never enter our minds. We are not concerned about inferiority or superiority at all.

## ***4. The fourth level of development – Paradigm Shift***

This is the level of impersonality. This is a very high level. It is at this level that we learn to depersonalise all that has been personalised as “mine.” By cultivating calmness of mind, we have seen how thoughts of “self” disappears when the mind is fully tranquil. We know that the self-consciousness is a result of tensions in the body and emotional excitement. We are fully convinced that there is no real “self” to talk about. We understand that the idea of “self” arises from personalisation. Although we understand that there is no true “self,” yet thoughts of “self” spring up by habit. So we try to overcome the habit by constantly watching the mind for pop-ups and dwelling on depersonalising thoughts:

### **Depersonalising thoughts**

- (1) My body is dependent on conditions*
- (2) What is dependent is unstable*
- (3) What is unstable is not as I want*
- (4) What is not as I want is painful*
- (5) What is not as I want, and is painful, is not under my power*
- (6) What is not under my power cannot be “mine”*
- (7) What is not mine cannot be “me” or my “self.”*

We think in the same way, regarding every part of the personality. When we have been able to depersonalise the total personality, the thought “I am” does not arise as a real fact. When the thought “I am” is absent, how can there be the thought “I am inferior?” This is how the harmonious perspective can put an end to all troubles described above. Yet this depersonalisation has to be done in degrees, according to different levels of progress.

When this Buddhist meditation, as taught by the Buddha, is practiced, one begins to see oneself as an impersonal process, which is really the modern scientific perspective, although this perspective does not play a dominant role in any scientist’s mind, in normal life. This unfortunate condition has been called, “cognitive dissonance.” This dissonance is because we are governed by habits of thought, just as a computer is governed by the software. Yet it is possible to overcome wrong habits of thought by consciously cultivating right habits of thought. It has to be done through constant repetition of right thoughts in the mind. This means, this harmonious perspective has to be reflected upon day and night by constant repetition. This is the meaning of **insight meditation** in Buddhism.

This is how one depersonalises what has been personalized. This depersonalisation in thought (*ditthi*) has to penetrate into one's feelings (*sankappa*), and behaviour in the form of speech, (*vaca*) and action (*kammanta*) and one's whole life style (*ajiva*). This can happen only by constant practice (*vayama*), or repetition of this way of thinking. This means paying constant introverted attention (*satipatthana*) to one's thoughts, feelings, speech, action, and life. When this is done, one regains one's lost mental equilibrium (*samadhi*). When this equilibrium is successfully attained, followed by proper insight into the reality of impersonality, one gets disinterested (*nibbindati*) in one's personality, being disinterested, one becomes dispassionate (*virajjati*), being dispassionate, one is freed from the “delusion of existence” as a “self” (*vimuchchati*).

## **Regaining the mental equilibrium**

Our problem is that we have lost our mental equilibrium, because of our reaction to the environmental stimulation of our senses. We not only react, we also personalize the reaction, thinking “I react.” Then we begin to experience the instability of what has been personalized. Our mind is then shaken by the changing vicissitudes of life. If, on the other hand, we depersonalise what has been personalized, our mind is not shaken any more by whatever happens to the impersonal phenomena. Thus we regain our mental equilibrium.

This “self identity” or “notion of self” is indeed a tragedy because it carries with it all the miseries of life. We can turn our life into a joyful comedy by gaining freedom from this “delusion of self.” This makes Buddhism a very optimistic way of thought, though some writers have mistakenly called it pessimism. Freedom from “self” is **not death**; on the contrary, it is the **freedom from death**. When there is no “self” who is there to die? Obviously, this loss of “self” is the only way to perfect happiness, however fearful it may look. It is also the only true way to **immortality**, which all religions ultimately seek.

This is the Buddhist idea of awakening from the “dream of existence.” Of course, this process of depersonalization is not a sudden occurrence. It is a gradual process of growth and evolution. How long it takes depends on the individual's level of maturity in terms of readiness to give up the pleasure principle and accept the reality of impersonality. According to the Buddha, an intelligent and serious meditator can reach perfection in seven years the maximum. Some may take much longer. Yet some have done it in seven days, and very few overnight. The important point, however, is that every step one advances, a greater degree of happiness one experiences in life.

This teaching of the Buddha is worthy of special study by modern psychologists. Such a study could end up in a major break through in the field of psychotherapy.

It is interesting to note that modern psychiatrists and psychotherapists have been nicknamed "shrink" by Americans, because they are being compared to the Native American medicine men of old. It is believed that the ancient medicine men could, by some method, shrink the heads of their enemies, after killing them, and preserve them as trophies. This "head shrinking," however, can be given a more laudable interpretation in relation to Buddhist psychotherapy. A properly carried out psychotherapy, according to the Buddha, could be seen as a deflation of a person's "ego," which is head-shrinking. The removal of the delusion of "self" can be seen as a deflation of the “ego” of a person.

This Buddhist approach to psychotherapy is a deflation carried to its ultimate end. This form of therapy does not merely make abnormal people normal; it makes normal people “supernormal.” This means that Buddhist psychotherapy is a radical therapy, and that the Buddha becomes the "Radical Shrink."

## **THE END**

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